

NEW YORK Saturday Star Journal

A POPULAR PAPER FOR PLEASURE & PROFIT

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Vol. III.

E. F. Beadle,
William Adams,
David Adams,
PUBLISHERS.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 18, 1873.

TERMS IN ADVANCE: One copy, four months, \$1.00
One copy, one year, 5.00.
Two copies, one year, 5.00.

No. 149.



Stealthily increasing, the water crept in through the widening seams.



THE FALSE WIDOW; OR, FLORIEN REDESDALE'S FORTUNE.

BY MRS. JENNIE DAVIS BURTON.

Author of "Adria, the Adopted," "Strangely Wed," "Madame Durand's Proteges."

CHAPTER I.

THE DESERT ISLE.

MID-OCEAN.
A sky like a canopy of pearl, with the sun hung like a burning globe against it. The sea glassy calm, with one tiny object dotting the watery waste.

A boat lay motionless upon the quiet ocean's breast. A torn rag of a sail hung limp at the mast, but not a puff of air stirred its tattered folds. The intense heat had beaten down until the seams of the little craft gaped wide; it was rudderless, utterly at the mercy of wind or wave.

During this dead calm, the brine of the ocean stole in at the opened cracks, and only constant bailing kept the boat afloat. It held two occupants—a man and a woman. The man lay in the bottom of the boat, with sunken wild eyes glaring about him, veiled now and again by the heavy lids when he would drift away in unconsciousness; his lips were swollen, purple and cracked, and a mutter or a groan broke over them as the agony he was enduring forced an utterance. The woman had suffered less, but famine was stamped on her features and looked out of her hollow eyes. She was on her knees, monotonously dipping out the rising flood, casting a glance now and then at her companion in distress, or searching the horizon for a sail.

For fourteen days and nights only those few planks had intervened between them and eternity; for half that time they had been without food or water, except once when a dead fish floated to the surface near them. The woman had secured it and torn it ravenously with her strong, white teeth;

but the man turned away from the portion she offered him with a shudder of disgust, and without proffering it a second time, she finished the last morsel. Later, his appetite might have overcome his fastidiousness, but not another scrap of even such questionable fare came to their view.

Stealthily increasing, the water crept in through the widening seams. The woman saw it with fear and despair, but never paused in her task of bailing out the boat.

"It's no use struggling," she said harshly, throwing a burning look toward the man. "There's not a sail to be seen, and we'll not keep afloat till night."

He made no answer, but moved painfully, looking up at the pitiless sky.

"It's certain death to us both, I suppose," she continued in a reckless tone. "If either escape, though, it will be me. Give me the papers, Alec; they'll do no one any good at the bottom of the ocean."

He thrust his hand into his breast, and as if her words recalled a little of his strength, raised himself on one elbow, and glared a warning at her as she would have drawn nearer.

"Keep off!" he gasped, hoarsely. "As Heaven hears me I'll throw them into the sea first."

"They'll go there soon. It's no great matter, but I would regard your wishes if I got back, Alec. I've faced death since we started on this voyage, and I'd never risk the consequences now that I might have plotted for once."

Had he seen the cunning gleam in those downcast eyes, he would have been further assured of the insincerity of her words. It was replaced by the sullen dullness of despair

as her thoughts reverted to their situation. She flung down the vessel she had used for bailing, and let her hands drop.

"We may as well die first as last. It's only an hour or two more at best."

With a cry the man rose up, with outstretched, quivering arm.

"Look, Mirette, look! An island in the sky!"

They both saw it, a long, low line of land, seemingly set in that canopy of dazzling blue. Their eyes turned upon the surrounding waters in eager expectation, but not so much as a straw met their searching gaze.

"An illusion—but the illusions of this life are nearly past for me," said Mirette, bitterly.

The other sunk back weak and trembling, but with a ray of hope flickering in his breast.

"I've heard of such things before," he said, panting. "I can't give an explanation of the phenomenon, but that was a reflection of a real island we have just seen. Oh, if we could but reach it, if there was any breeze—"

As if invoked by his words, a breath of air ruffled the utter calm, and stirred the tattered sail. With hope renewed, the woman went to work again with feverish vigor clearing the fragile shell of the rising water.

Presently came another puff of air, and in half an hour a stiff breeze was blowing. Then a shadow rushed up as if from the very midst of the sea. It widened and darkened, the sky grew speedily overcast, the increasing stir of the waters broke them into waves, which ran momentarily higher. A sudden storm was racing into effect.

A short interval and then it broke upon them. The crazy boat rocked and dipped and seemed on the point of capsizing; it was driven before the wind, and beaten back by the waves. Mirette lowered the ragged sail, which, inefficient at the best, was an added danger now. The rain burst over them in a blinding sheet of a few minutes' duration, and then swept on eastward. The sea ran heavy and high; the boat plunged, creaking and straining, but breasted the waves still, though threatening destruction at any moment.

The man and woman had spread the sail with a depression in the center, and caught of the rain sufficient to relieve their insatiate thirst.

They had a life-preserver each, which they fastened upon their persons, and prepared for a final encounter with the waves when the worst should come. The little bark drifted on, holding together beyond the utmost limits of their expectations.

"Look!" cried Mirette, with sudden sharpness. "Land, it is land!"

A long, low, dark line lay before them, and the boat drifted on toward it. Every energy was now devoted to keeping it afloat, and after what seemed an eternity, they were within plain sight of the shore.

The white-capped waves rolled high, but the absence of a continuous line left them nothing to apprehend from breakers. But now, with safety in sight, the boat almost

ceased to advance, and settled speedily, despite their utmost efforts.

There were oars, which Mirette had tied together, and she had wrenched loose a spar after the destruction of the boat became a certainty. They cast these into the sea, and following, clung to them in the last desperate struggle for life. The wind rising again, gave token that the storm was not over. But before the rain broke down again they both had been washed ashore.

Their refuge proved to be an island which was little more than a sandbank. It was covered with a growth of rank, reed-like grass, but there was no other vegetation, which they accepted as proof that the island was at times quite submerged. There was no water, but for the immediate time they were supplied from the discharge of the clouds. Clams were washed up along the shore, which Mirette secured, and fed on voraciously. Alec rallied for a few hours, then sunk into a profound sleep of utter exhaustion and awoke in a burning delirium. The packet of papers inclosed in a proof wrapping which he had guarded so faithfully were exposed now to the hand of the despoiler.

Mirette stole them from his bosom without one pang of conscience, and secured them upon her own person.

"He may die now if he likes," she whispered, fiercely. "The sooner the better, if any rescue is to reach here. I am almost tempted to consign him an offering to the spirits of the deep."

The whispered thought was only the weight of empty words, for the desolation of that barren shore would have proved intolerable but for the germ of life lingering in his unconscious form, still sufficient to impart a sense of companionship. She bestowed little care upon him, but kept watch of the horizon in hope of succor.

It came sooner than she had dared to hope. On the second day, a sail appearing like a tiny speck grew steadily more distinct as the vessel bore straight down upon the little island. She had no means of raising a signal to attract the attention of the crew, but, sighting land, a boat was sent ashore in the hope of obtaining water.

Mirette met them upon the beach. Alec lay far back amid the reeds, in a heavy apathetic sleep, from which she told herself he would never awake.

In answer to the inquiries of the sailors she satisfied them that there was no water upon the little island, and, when they went back to the ship, she accompanied them, with never a word of that other survivor of storm and wreck, whose presence on that sandy shore they did not suspect.

CHAPTER II.

FLORIEN.

MISS DEBORAH GRAY, stiff, tall and gaunt, as she always appeared, had never seemed stiffer, taller, more gaunt and forbidding than she did one bright Spring morning as she stood in the shadow just beyond the flood of sunshine which streamed in over the bare white kitchen floor.

It seemed a studied principle of Miss De-

borah never to receive any thing from the joyous brightness, which is like healthful elixir to more versatile natures, so she seemed always to be surrounded by an impalpable gray shadow, which detracted nothing from her sharp angles of form and feature, and lent no softening influence to her hard expression. She held an open letter in her hand. The visible lines in her forehead had deepened and closed in a corrugated knot of wrinkles, her thin lips were compressed, and her eyes of light gray grown colder—if that were possible—than their accustomed wont.

Her hand closed upon and crumpled the written sheet, which she thrust hastily behind her, as a young girl came, with a springy step, up the garden path, and flashed across the stream of yellow sunlight—herself an incarnation of a glorious brightness, which was all the more attractive because it was apparent as a promise quite as much as in reality. Just now there was an unusual flush on the round, sunbrowned cheeks, a sparkle of excitement glinting in her eyes, which were of the dark hazel which verges upon brown. She walked straight up to confront Miss Deborah with her bright young face mingling imperiousness with defiance, and her clear voice ringing with a sense of indignity put upon her.

"You needn't try to hide it from me, aunt Deborah," said she. "I know you have got a letter from abroad, though you are so anxious to hide the fact from me. You had another one a month ago, and never breathed of it. I want to know why you didn't deliver the message it contained?"

Deborah Gray stood stiff as a poker, still keeping the letter at her back, regarding the girl with a stern silence, which was meant to awe her into more submissive deportment. Whatever the customary effect of that unwavering gaze may have been, it failed signally in accomplishing its object now.

"You needn't try to stare me down, aunt Deb," said she, with scornful accent. "I'll not be put down, I tell you. I'll find out what's in the letter you hold there as sure as I'm here, and you'll deliver what messages have been addressed to me, or I'll let it be known about the breaches of faith you are guilty of. Shame on you, who profess to be a Christian. In my opinion you've been truly guilty of stealing as was little Jacky White, who was caught taking potatoes from our cellar last winter; you were severe enough on him, though it was proved actual hunger drove him to the deed. You have no such good excuse to account for your action."

"Florry! how dare you speak in that manner to me?" exclaimed Miss Gray. "Go to your room, and don't come down again until you are prepared to conduct yourself in a more exemplary manner."

"I will not go to my room, aunt Deb, and I will know the contents of that letter before I budge from this spot. Will you let me see it?"

Her tone was of command, not entreaty. Miss Gray looked grimly and sternly down

at the rebellious girl, who neither flinched nor abated zeal in her declared purpose.

"Will you let me see it?" she demanded again.

"Really, Florry—" began her aunt, unwilling to yield the point. But, with a cat-like spring, Florry darted past her and clutched at the letter, but Deborah was too quick for her, holding it up far out of her reach.

Florry's little foot came down upon the floor with a resounding stamp.

"Give it to me, I say!"

"Florry!" The single exclamation was a marvel of frigid severity as it dropped from Miss Deb's lips. Her skinny hand descended upon the shoulder of the excited little fury, whose eyes were flaming with the dry, red blaze of anger. Florry wrenched herself away, and sunk, sullenly, into one of the kitchen chairs. She would not continue a struggle where inequality existed to her own unconquerable disadvantage.

"You ungrateful child! Is this the return for all my care of you? It is well that I carry the conviction of duty faithfully performed in my bosom, and the peace which is the unfulfilling reward for it. Your wicked passion can harm no one but yourself. How can you reconcile such outrageous conduct with the precepts I have endeavored to instill into your mind. 'Better is he who ruleth his spirit—'"

"Aunt Deb, you shall not quote Scripture to me. I know I'm a great sinner—you've told me so often enough—and I don't know that I care to be any thing else. If you sermonize, I shall go straight out of this door, and not come back until I have seen Judge Lessingham, and discover if there is not some means to force a regard of my rights."

"If you move a step you shall never know from my lips," cried aunt Deb, angrily. "You don't deserve to be told any thing, and you should know I had good enough reason to spare you the knowledge of that other letter. I should have told you all about them both before this time but for your inexcusable behavior. Now, tell me, how do you know that any message was sent to you?"

Florry hung her head and her cheeks tingled; then her neck straightened proudly, and her gaze was unabashed and fearless as ever.

"Mr. Walter Lynne brought it from the office and left it in passing," said she. "The envelope was one of those transparent white kind, and some of the writing showed quite plainly through it. The foreign postmark attracted his eye, and without meaning it he read some fragmentary lines, but not enough to understand the import of a single sentence. One was 'Tell my little Florry'—another—'love my dear'—Oh! Aunt Deb, why have you never told me that papa remembers and loves me?"

The full lips grew tremulous, but the angry amazement depicted in her aunt's face kept Florry's resentful spirit still in the ascendant.

"Florry! have you been meeting that man?"

"Aunt Deborah, I have been meeting that man."

"After my warnings! after my commands! Oh, what a bitter, thankless task I undertook when I accepted you into my charge."

There was a malicious gleam in Florry's eyes, and without doubt at any other time she would have proved herself reticent and tantalizing, but now her object in view was too serious to be hazarded for a trifle.

"You didn't give me time to say that it was purely by accident," she resumed.

"I have obeyed you on that point, I assure you on any other. You might know that or I would have understood your treachery before this time."

"I will not permit you to use such language in addressing me. You will be sorry for it and justify me when you come to know my motives. Here is the letter, you were demanding just now to see."

Florry reached for it eagerly—a thin, rustling sheet written in a sloping feminine hand. Her hand fell as she saw that, and that the paper was edged with black. The color went out of her expressive face, leaving it awed and still.

"Is papa dead?" she asked, in a subdued tone.

"Yes, he's dead"—in a voice which was hard and bitter.

Florry looked at her with tearless, reproachful eyes.

"Can't you forgive him now that he is dead?" she asked.

"How could I pray 'forgive us our trespasses' if I had not forgiven him? I forgive, but I never forget."

Self-deluding sophistry! Deborah Gray thought she meant just what she said, but she should have known that true forgiveness consists in forgetting the injury.

"Poor papa!" sighed the girl. "You never let me know much about him, aunt Deb, but I shall never forget how grand and noble he looked the few times I can remember seeing him. I never can believe that he was a deliberately wicked man."

Miss Gray's lips compressed.

"You'll be apt to think him a deliberately inconsiderate one, then." Though not often delicate spoken, she paused to cast about for a mild term which might not shock the orphan's heart at the moment when all her tenderest associations should throng to remembrance. That other letter was the announcement of his marriage with a French girl he ran across out there in Sydney. The message he sent you was just this—'Tell my little Florry that I hope she may sometime learn to love my dear wife in the place of the mother she never knew.' He spoke, but indefinitely, of coming home, and I thought there was no occasion for you to know yet. Think of a brazen, Frenchy thing, after my sister Winnifred!"

That last expression gave Florry an insight of the true impulse which had prompted her aunt to withhold the news. Her sister, Winnifred, had been her idol. The two had been alone in the world, and all in all to each other until Winnifred married against the elder sister's will. Hubert Redesdale had just graduated, was reckless and impulsive as the wildest college student, and Deborah Gray never paused to distinguish gradations between total moral depravity and youthful follies. The marriage did not prove a happy one. The couple were ill-assorted as a couple well could be, and one of the violent disagreements which came to be a part of their daily life ended in the young wife returning to her sister's home, which Redesdale made no effort to induce her to leave again. In reality he had been harshly judged. Winnifred was a selfish doll of a woman who had no sympathy in accordance with

him, and was always setting her narrow views against his opinions and wishes. She died of a pulmonary disease when Florry was in her babyhood, but her sister Deborah accused Hubert Redesdale of blighting her life and breaking her heart.

"That letter is from your father's new wife," continued Miss Gray, in her hard, dry voice. "She says they had made all their arrangements for a return to the States, but a week before the vessel was to sail he was taken with yellow fever and died in three days' time. She intended to come on all the same, so we may look for her now at any time. Read the letter and see what you think of the prospect."

Thus reminded, Florry perused the missive—formal and cleverly worded, but dictatorial in style, and where grief was expressed, diffuse to insincerity. One paragraph the girl lingered over.

"My husband left a considerable fortune which he accumulated during the dozen years he remained in Australia. The bulk of it was conveyed some time before our marriage to a responsible New York house, and his will, drawn up and witnessed here, was forwarded at the same time to the keeping of the head of the firm. It leaves that entire portion to his daughter Florry, but he made liberal provision for me from later accumulations."

The business-like details seemed out of place in this first announcement of her grief, written so soon after her bereavement. It went on to state that the girl should be sent to some suitable school, as the writer had been led to believe her education was not of a kind to suit the position she would hereafter occupy. Florry's wayward heart rebelled. What right had this stranger, a woman whom she had never seen, whom she felt intuitively she could neither love nor trust, to assert control over her?

"I'll not be disposed of in any such way," she declared, indignantly.

"She will be your personal guardian until you are of age," said Miss Deborah, grimly. "She can do as she likes with you."

"She shall let me alone to do as I like, or she'll find her guardianship any thing but a pleasant undertaking," declared Florry.

Miss Deborah opened her lips as if to utter a reproof, but closed them again without having spoken. For once Florry's waywardness received no check since it was directed against a cause which was a bitter cross to her spinster aunt.

The girl went slowly out of the wide kitchen, which was a model of cleanly neatness, and climbed the steps leading to her attic room. There were a couple of dormer windows set in the sloping roof; the room was wide and low, with a strip of bright rag-carpet covering the center of the floor. At the sides it was bare but adorned daintily with a bed, a chair, and a rickety washstand, a little worn trunk, and a little round mirror hung upon the wall. A few dresses hung upon pegs in one corner, and there was a miscellaneous pile of pamphlets, books and papers, on a shelf.

Florry sat upon the worn little trunk, resting her chin upon her hand, thinking sadly of the father, evidences of whose love or care she had never experienced. There seemed a weight upon her heart, a vague, dull pain, unlike a grief brought forcibly home to her by the death of one she had known familiarly. A little moisture dimmed her eyes, but, unlike most girls, Florry was seldom moved to tears. Her capacity for joy or suffering was great, but a deep emotion always left her subdued and silent.

Growing up as she had done beneath Miss Deborah's shadow, she had not failed to penetrate her bitter enmity toward Hubert Redesdale, though the spinster, always reticent, was unusually so upon this very subject. It may have been this very reticence which enlisted Florry in warm sympathy on her father's side; certainly it was through no clearer understanding of the truth than she gathered from studying the pretty simpering face which hung over the mantel in Miss Deborah's room. Florry never looked at the pictured face without being glad that she in no way resembled it.

While she was lost in deep reverie, Miss Deborah walked back and forth through the house below. She seated herself upon her sewing at last, but catching sight of the letter which careless Florry had flung upon the floor, she picked it up, and, standing irresolute for a moment, turned and went into her bedroom, which opened across a narrow hall. She paused before an old-fashioned chest of drawers and took from one of the compartments a square wooden box locking with a key that hung on a ribbon about her neck. She opened the box and placed the letter in it, but before her hand was withdrawn a loud tramping, crashing from the garden sent her hurrying in that direction.

"Florry! Florry! come quick!" That dreadful cry was breaking in again! She screamed. "Florry, I say!"

That last cry reached Florry's ears, and she came down slowly, pausing on the threshold of the now-vacant room.

Miss Deb was already out, brandishing a broomstick in the face of the intruding animal, and the open box she had left caught Florry's eye. It contained nothing but a package of letters, and the girl was near enough to read her own name on one of them. Scending across the little space, she seized the lot, and ran them rapidly over. Twelve letters, all bearing her address, lying with unbroken covers.

Florry sped out with them held close in her hands, scarlet flames leaping hotly into her cheeks.

"I'll never forgive you for that as long as I live," she cried, panting with passion, and without another word flew past the startled old maid and out at the little wicket gate into the lane.

"Florry, come back!" cried her aunt. But Florry, never heeding, perhaps not hearing, sped straight on until the flutter of her light garments was shut from sight by the trees which fringed the lane.

CHAPTER III

FLORRY neither paused nor swerved aside from a straight course until she rushed across the strip of low sandy beach on that Jersey shore, and, sure of foot, skimmed over the slippery rocks which the outgoing tide left bare, while the crevices between were channels that would not be drained for a half-hour yet.

By the rough, hilly course of the rocks she reached the bluff, a quarter of a mile away from the strip of even beach. She flung herself down in a cranny where an overhanging rock screened her from the

chance of observation from above, and let the missives she had clutched so tightly all the way shower down in an irregular heap at her side, while her grief and angered heart swelled in painful throbs which shook her frame like suppressed sobbing. She clenched her hands and set her teeth together until she had mastered the passion assailing her.

"Oh, papa! poor, poor papa!" she cried, letting her head drop into the support of her clasped hands; and, as though a little of her burden had escaped in that regretful cry, she composed herself to examine the letters, the first of which had lain in waiting for her for twelve long years.

Long, loving letters they were, which gave her an insight into the strong unrest, the unsatisfied craving, which had made her father a voluntary exile from his home and friends. He had never forgotten her, as stern aunt Deb had permitted her to think. Her eyes grew soft and humid with unshed tears of tenderness as she observed the date of each yearly letter, and knew they had been intended to reach her on her birthdays. Some of the later ones seemed to breathe a reproach that she never responded to his messages of affection, but the last one of all touched her as none of the others had done. A paragraph ran:

"And now, my daughter, I have found a sense of restful peace and a new interest in life which I never expected to hold. I have been a lonely man, trying to drown my discontent in constant employment, or when that failed, throwing myself heart and soul into some adventurous mission which can always be found in good cause in this wild Australia. In an expedition of this kind, a few months ago, we were attacked by bush-rangers, and only succeeded in beating them off after a tough struggle and the loss of half our number. I was taken up insensible and sorely wounded, with other slight and carried back to Sydney. One of the dead was a French gentleman named Draveau, with whom I had a standing acquaintance, and it was in endeavoring to rescue him I received my severest wound. At the hospital, of his sister, who learned the facts, I was conveyed directly to the residence he had occupied, and the grateful, noble woman nursed me back to strength and health against odds which seemed at first insurmountable. I can not hope to impress you, my daughter, with any clear understanding of the pure, strong soul I learned to lean upon during the hours of convalescence, which were never tedious, thanks to her ministrations. I found her a woman of earnest faithfulness and I will be a happier man than in all my life yet when she becomes my wife, as she has promised to do. Can I hope that my little girl will be glad for her father's sake, until I can bring my two loves together, as I hope to do some day? I have told Mirette of the daughter I have not seen for twelve long years, and she is prepared to receive you with open arms and heart."

There was much more in the same strain; and Florry, loving her father's memory, for these confidences he had so openly given her, felt herself grow bitterly indignant at the woman who had written that cold, calculating letter immediately after his death.

"He loved her so," she thought, "but before the grave closed over him she was counting the advantages her position as his widow would afford her. Oh, how vilely she must have deceived him! He thought her an angel, but I know she must be the antithesis of an angel, may become to have imposed upon him. Who knew his death was mercifully sent to save him from the shock of knowing her in her true light?"

Hours passed while she sat there thinking mournfully of her father's fate, and realizing something of what she had lost through never knowing him. But Florry's nature was one of those strange compounds which will leap at once from one extreme of feeling to the very opposite, so now she flashed again with indignant anger as she gathered together her precious letters and read them securely with a scarlet ribbon which had been twined in her short, brown locks.

"How dare aunt Deb preach duty or gratitude to me?" she asked herself, passionately. "I'm sure I don't owe her much for her care of me, nor for her example of honesty, whatever her precepts may have been. She has always treated me as though I were a baby, with neither judgment nor common sense, but I'll not be led blindfold by her or any one hereafter. If that woman dares attempt to control me against my will, I'll find so many ways to torment her that she'll be glad to let me take my own course, if it does lead me down to destruction, as aunt Deb will be apt to declare."

So absorbed was she that she did not hear a step across the sands, which lay bare and dry now. A young man taking a short cut by way of the bluffs from the hotel, a mile up the shore, had espied her perched there in the cranny amid the cliffs. He took a nonchalant, leisurely survey of the little figure swayed by the force of her tempestuous feelings, and with a sweep of his eye assured himself that he had no cause to fear the intrusion of a third party. Then with a few swift strides he cleared the space between them, and she started up with a wavering of the color in the bright cheeks as she found him suddenly at her side.

What an infernal trick that Lucretia Borgia look! I surprised upon your face, he asked, flippantly. "One would think you meditated dire revenge upon your worst enemy."

"Not so bad as that, Mr. Lynne. I am only studying by what means I can circumvent my enemy."

Some shade differing from her usual frank outspokenness impressed him, and he asked with quick concern:

"What is the matter, Florry? Has any thing occurred to distress you?"

His tender tone penetrated to the girl's sore heart. The poor child had experienced little enough of delicate treatment since she could first remember, and beneath her impulsive waywardness she carried a high-strung, sensitive organization that found relief now in his sympathetic presence. He thought that he had never looked so pretty as at that moment, with the griefed shade clouding her face, her fresh lips apart and quivering, and her hazel eyes grown deep and dark with the softening force of her emotion. Walter Lynne was fastidious to the last degree on some points, and though neither a strong nor a pure-minded man, he had placed his standard of womanhood on a pedestal which he was not blind enough to believe that Florry had reached, but she had sufficient foresight to discern that she would attain it in the future, when the capricious waywardness of the girl should merge into the earnest experience of the woman.

Now she was little more than a willful child whose hoydenish proclivities shocked while they amused him. But her untram-

meled grace, and bright, youthful beauty, had a fascination for him which was lacking in the matured charms of more than one eligible belle who would have willingly bestowed her fair hand for the asking.

"Walter, oh, Walter! Papa is dead, poor papa! And see, all these letters, which seem now almost like revelations from him in heaven, are the proof that he was noble and brave and tender in his thoughts of me always. I would have been so proud and fond of him, and now he is gone without ever knowing how I could have loved him."

"Through no fault of yours, Florry, he held you aloof from him all your life."

"But he remembered me. He wrote to me every year, and aunt Deb kept back his letters. I'll never forgive her—I never shall; for if I had only known him as I do now, and let him tell how his daughter could have worshipped him, he might never have cared for any one else. But now his wife is to come here, and shows already that she means to rule me if she can."

"His wife?"

"He was married, and meant to come back here to make his home. Oh, I shall hate her, I know."

"I hope not—for your own sake," he replied, with a smile at her vehemence.

"But I shall. You may read papa's letters, Walter, and I will tell you what she wrote; and then see if you can make any thing of her but an artful, scheming woman."

"Not now; I have not time, but you can tell me, Florry."

Rapidly she sketched the details of all she had learned that day, unconsciously omitting at first the fact of the fortune her father had accumulated during the years of his absence. She scarcely thought of it along with the other matters which to her were so much more important.

"So you are to be sent away to school," said Walter, aloud. To himself he was thinking that, while the measure might be the polishing of a rough diamond, it was scarcely calculated to content her with the humble sphere she occupied. "Why, the new Mrs. Redesdale seems determined to make a fine lady of you!"

"I won't go," asserted Florry, defiantly; "I'll not be packed out of my way like a piece of troublesome furniture. That's all she wants, I know, to be rid of me."

"And when you will stay as you are?" he questioned.

"With aunt Deb, after that!" she pointed to the letters. "No, indeed! Oh, Walter, what shall I do? If any one can find some way for me out of it all, you can."

Her pretty, appealing face and innocent trust of him were not without their effect upon her companion. Half in love with her as he had been for weeks past—he had made love to her in a negative way, which seemed very positive to her while it did not count against him at this moment—he loved her, he could forget worldly caution and his own ambitious aims for the sake of molding her into the glorious creature she was destined to become. With this feeling strong upon him, he expressed himself unguardedly.

"I think I could, little darling." Then, in an attempt to laugh off the impression his tender tone conveyed—"What is it that true little heart of yours could beat out poor Florry, you should not be left to the mercy of another guardianship if you would accept mine."

Her startled eyes fixed full upon him, and her color coming and going in vivid waves, showed how far her intent had been from drawing out this half-confession. But she had such implicit faith in him that when he had spoken she accepted his meaning frankly, as she believed he intended it. The remembrance of her changed position, of the wealth which would be hers, was recalled by his words.

"What if it should be so, Walter? What if I really carry gold along with me?"

"Can you ask Florry? But then I wouldn't dare speak of the hope I have been looking forward to as a beacon-light. Oh, if I could in justice to us both, ask you to be my wife now! But my income is of the narrowest, and— isn't it a shame for a man of my age and opportunities to say—I become a beggar?"

He had no resource but actual labor, which I have knowledge to perform, I would starve. How can I ask you to share a fate like that?"

For once the man was sincere in all he said. He felt that she of all women was the one who could raise him from the mean intricacies of the life he now pursued. He had a piece of sterile property somewhere, so secured that he could not throw it out of his hands, which brought him an annual dole that was no more than a drop in the bucket of one of his necessities. It is doubtful if he himself knew how he kept up appearances. He dabbled a little in stocks when he could secure a surplus; he had a far-off relative who advanced him sparing sums occasionally, and on whose will he built up a mountain of bright expectation; he had hosts of friends from whom he never scrupled to receive pecuniary benefit; and behind these he had nothing more stable than "his luck" to depend upon, and that luck ran so well in his favor that he gambled and betted books were mostly accountable for the sums that went slipping through his fingers as though some modern Ceresus stood prepared to keep him upon his feet.

He was Florry's hero just now, and she made of him an idol without a flaw.

"But I am not poor, now, Walter," she broke out, eagerly. "I am to be an heiress. That is one reason why I am to be sent away to get vanished and veneered against my appearance when madame's term of mourning shall be over. Don't let me fall into her hands, will you?"

Standing there with his fair hair tossed back from his white brow, his features rather effeminate in their delicate outlines, his slightly receding chin dotted with the shadow of a dimple, he did not appear like a man in whom to repose a vital trust. When not too selfishly swayed by personal motives, he might be generous and chivalrous, but sacrificing, strong and reliant, never. He brightened perceptibly under Florry's declaration. If it had come from any one else, he might have paused to weigh probabilities and count the costs, for he was cold-blooded in his gratifications generally; but Florry, in her unsuspecting innocence, possessed for him the fascinations which could stir his deepest and purest passions. He put out his hand with an impulsive gesture, and looked straight forward into her honest eyes.

"Florry, it must seem almost wickedly selfish for me to say it now; but I have loved you such a long, long time, and you need me. Will you be my wife and risk all

future chances? Is it too much to ask of your generosity that you shall believe me anxious only for your happiness—our happiness, after that thoughtless speech of mine? I meant it though in one sense, I couldn't ask you to be mine to see you suffer, perhaps, but if you'll take me as I am I'll work for you eagerly and earnestly as if you were really penniless, as I believed you in all this time I loved you so."

A little smile, flushed and very eagerly expected, gave the handsome, effeminate face of the man before her.

Florry, open as the day with those she loved, unhesitatingly dropped her brown palms into his white ones, and answered with shy, sweet submission:

"If you wish it so, Walter."

Then suddenly a crimson tide dyed brow and cheek as she realized that her own appeal had invited this outburst. She drew back before she could divine her thought or the slight distrust which she did not admit was such even to herself.

"It would not be right for me to clog your future," she said, simply. "I forget for a moment what a grand work it is for a man to carve his way up as you have told me you intend to do. I have fought my own battles before now, and I can do it again."

Mentally she execrated the visionary schemes he had intrusted to her in their idle moments together—before, as she now discovered, the intimacy and issued her interdiction—but it only required a glance of reproach to melt her half-formed resolve.

"Florry, if you make me distrust you, I shall lose all faith in human truth. I want you to help me, darling. Your love is more precious to me than all the success I shall ever wring from the hands of a selfish and cruel world!"

That last sentence savored something of protestations behind the footlights of a second-class theater, but Florry was just romantic enough to accept it literally. She did not resist when he took her little brown fluttering hands prisoner again, and quieted them by the magnetism of his cool touch.

"Little siren," he said, laughingly, as the long, delicious moments dragged by with their burden of unalloyed sweets, "how you have betrayed me into un pardonable neglect, it's not too late yet. I am engaged particularly at the Lodge for this afternoon, and half of it has already passed."

"And oh! I won't let aunt Deb be at her blackest? I would tremble if I were not so near ready to defy her."

"To-night," said he, with a smile. "After to-night you need only tremble before me."

"Ah, my lord and master to be, see that your bird is fairly caged before you threaten it," she answered, saucily.

"You will be ready, Florry—at midnight?"

Then, or when you will, Walter."

He drew her to him with a sudden motion of his arm, and the burning fervor of his parting kiss was not at all simulated. It lingered like delicious odor on the girl's lips as she flew, rather than walked, back over the gleaming yellow sands.

Miss Deb was invisible, and Florry went straight to her room, glad that no harsh interruption was to break upon her happy dream. She heard her aunt's step presently passing in firm, long, masculine strides, back and forth across the bare floor of the kitchen below. Then a sizzling sound and a savory smell, and she knew that their early supper was being prepared, but she did not move until Deborah called from below:

"Florry, are you there? Come down."

Not a word was uttered between them during the meal. Florry, who had gone thenceless, found her appetite, despite her love-dream, and Miss Deb's silence was ominous of a coming break.

"Only let her hold in till to-morrow," thought Florry, as she went about her usual evening tasks. Then—

Then she would be safe out of reach of the storm—that was her conclusion of the thought.

Hours later she sat by her open window and strained her ears to catch the sounds which came up at irregular intervals from below. Out of the line of all precedent, Miss Deborah was still astir, and her bed-room candle glowed a yellow gleam out athwart the black shadows gathered in the little yard. The old-fashioned clock had given its warning, and was on the very point of striking twelve. Florry was in despair. She tied up to the landing for the twentieth time, only to see again the unbroken thread of light which glimmered out from the spinster's open door.

"Why can't she go to bed?" fumed Florry, silently. "If I needed a clinching argument to convince me of aunt Deb's fastidious malice, I saw it in this doubly provoking moment of sitting and never passing her door unseen, and Walter is waiting now, I know. He is sure to betray himself like any other blundering man, the darling."

And while she fretted the clock struck, and a soft, almost inaudible whistle sounded from without. She started up.

"I must get down—he'll be taking the light for a signal next. There's only one way for it now, I suppose."

She caught up a little bundle she had prepared, and stole noiselessly into an adjoining room, where a window opened on the roof of the back-kitchen porch. She crept through, and groping her way carefully to the edge, peered over into the thick darkness.

"Walter!" she whispered.

No answer. Again louder—"Walter!"

The cracking of a twig under a cautious step, and he advanced from the protection of the garden foliage.

"Florry, are you there?"

"Hush! I'm coming down, Walter. Here, take this. Now I will swing myself down until I can reach your hand and then spring to that bed of thick turf. Aunt Deb is awake and up, and she'll be out upon us if she hears a sound."

Hurriedly whispering her explanation, Florry swung herself silently over the edge of the roof. There was a strong lattice-work at the sides of the porch, which afforded a footing as secure and quite as easy as the rope ladder brought into requisition by romantics on such occasions.

For, reader, dear, this was an elopement, planned between these two.

While Florry hung yet in mid-air, and Walter remained in expectant waiting below, the kitchen door was flung wide and Miss Deb stood framed within it.

Looming up grim and tall, with her flaming candle outstretched until it illuminated the whole area of the little yard, her astonished, angry glance took in the meaning of the scene.

(To be continued.)

THE GUILTELESS HEART.

BY GERALD SILVER.

The blush upon thy cheek is charming,
Fair as morn's first blushing light;
And thine eyes are ever glowing
Than cerise skies more bright.

But, cheeks soft glow, and eyes wild beaming,
Never were my soul's delight.
Nay! 'twas not thy argent beauty
That first won my loving heart;

Not thy charms, which beamed divinely,
Bade my sleeping passions start;
For the pleasure that thrilled me,
No outward beauty could impart.

Why is it, then, thy gentle presence
Doth this lasting bliss impart?
Is it at Love's radiant altar
Tends the flame with angel art?

Harken, maiden, I will tell you:
'Tis thy trusting, guileless heart!

The Rock Rider:

THE SPIRIT OF THE SIERRA.

A TALE OF THE THREE PARKS.

BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER.

AUTHOR OF "THE RED RAZOR," "THE KNIGHT OF THE RUBIES," "DOUBT-DEATH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

Mount brooded over the valley of the South Park, and all the dark greenward was alive with twinkling watch-fires, around which the warriors of three great tribes, the Comanches, the Apaches and the Cheyennes, were standing, sitting and lying.

At the mouth of the pass, clustered behind the white tilts of their wagons, the remnants of the soldiers were sullenly gathered, cheerless and fireless, without a drop of water in camp, save what remained in their canteens from the morning's filling, a scanty supply at best.

The Indians seemed to have settled down to a regular siege, every avenue of escape being closed up by their grim circle of fires, but no further attacks being made. The warriors had suffered too heavily for their rash charges to be disposed to repeat them as yet.

The soldiers, on the other hand, were sullen and dispirited. All their animals had been killed or stampeded, and they had no resource but to defend themselves behind the corral of wagons till help arrived, if ever help came.

In the midst of the corral a group of officers were gathered, talking over the prospect before them in low tones.

"We have plenty of ammunition, major," said one, in reply to a question from a gray-headed officer, who seemed to be the commander, "but the men to use it are not so plentiful. We have too many recruits, and half of them are down sick or wounded since this morning. That Cochise must have had spies out who knew our weakness, or the devils would never have dared to attack such a force as we have."

"How many men can you report for duty, then?" asked the major, a little crossly. "Don't theorize about Cochise, but tell me how many men I can depend on to cut through their line."

"Not more than seventy, sir, and half of them are green hands," said the major. "Green or not, we must make the attempt at daybreak," said Major Morris, firmly. "If we break through, I will send to Denver for help. As it is, we must cut our way through and spike the guns, so that the Indians can't use them."

"Allow me to suggest a better method, major," said another officer. "We have proved that the Indians dare not attack us while we stick together. Our fire is too heavy. Why not take the guns with us, and move down to one of those pools to-night? The men are choking with thirst and desperate. We have nothing left to lose, and every thing to gain. The moral effect on the Indians must be incalculable, if we move boldly and surprise them. They think we are disheartened at the death of the ladies."

"Hush, Taylor, hush! don't mention them," said the major, shuddering. "It's a fearful disgrace to five companies of United States troops that we should have let those devils carry off the General's wife and daughters, without being able to fire a shot to save them. It's a heart-breaking heart, and I shall demand a court-martial, and resign if I ever get out of this scrape alive."

"Crack!" went a rifle from under the wheel of a wagon, the place where the sentries were posted, and all the officers were on the alert in a moment, while the men jumped up on all sides from where they lay dozing. "Who fired that shot?" demanded the major, sternly, as every thing still remained quiet outside.

"The Indians did not appear to have noticed it."

"I fired, sir," responded a voice from under the wagon. "There's three Indians a-comin' this way a-horseback, and I've stopped 'em."

"Don't fire again till I tell you," said the major. "I want to see them."

He went down between the wagons, and peered out. The forms of three horsemen were distinctly visible, standing out black against the twilight, and the center one bore a square white flag on his lance.

"A flag of truce, by Heaven!" exclaimed the major. "We must not be the first to disarm it, gentlemen. Let us hear what they have to say. Boys, keep your eyes skinned all round. This may be only an Indian trick after all. I am going to hear their message."

Unfolding his white handkerchief, and displaying it for a counter-flag, the major advanced from the shelter of the wagons a few paces, when he halted and signaled the others to advance.

A number of Indians could be now seen standing by the fires, watching the advance of their envoys with apparent interest, and the fires, brightly blazing all round, made it a matter of difficulty for any one to cross the open ground without being seen.

At thirty paces distant one of the Indian envoys stuck his flag into the ground, dismounted, and advanced to meet the major.

He proved to be a magnificent chief, with scarlet plumes in his hair, dressed in the extreme of Indian dandyism, and heavily armed—no other than our friend, Red Lightning, with his left shoulder freshly bandaged from the wound of Buford's sword.

He executed a smart military salute to the major, for Red Lightning was proud of his proficiency in white customs, and then observed:

"How do, white chief?"

"Badly," said the major, sternly. "Being

an old army officer, he knew all the prominent chiefs by sight, and recognized the other. "Very badly, Red Lightning. The Great Father has treated you and Cochise well. What are you doing here to-day, then, killing his children? I myself saw rifles and powder issued to you not six weeks ago, and now you use them on us. Where is Cochise, the Apache chief? He is with you here, too."

"Cochise is here," said a deep voice; and one of the Indians dismounted and came forward.

Like Red Lightning, though only of medium stature, his chest was enormous, and he seemed to be possessed of unbounded strength. The expression of his face was that of ferocious, brutal insolence, which he cared not to conceal; and his weapons were more numerous, if possible, than those of Red Lightning. Such was the infamous Apache chief, Cochise, noted for more than a hundred cold-blooded murders.

"What does the white chief want with Cochise?" he demanded, sneeringly. "Men seldom call him twice."

"What do you mean, Cochise, by attacking us in this manner?" asked the officer, putting a bold face on matters to deceive the Indian. "Are you not ashamed to break your treaties? You will get no more rifles and blankets from the Great Father, when he hears of this."

"Bah! Squaws talk. Men kill," said Cochise, roughly. "Much powder, plenty rifle, in train. Cochise take him for seven years. Go on war-path. Den make peace with Great Father when tired and hungry. Good."

The cool audacity of the savage took the other aback for a moment, but Red Lightning addressed the third Indian in the rear, saying:

"Keeche-ah-que-kono, chief of the Cheyennes, come forward and tell the white chief what we want."

The third Indian turned his horse loose and came forward a gray-headed chief of dignified mien, who spoke English pretty well. He saluted the major as politely as Red Lightning had done, and the officer observed:

"I little thought to see you here, too, Keeche. You'll be sorry for it."

"Maybe so I not be sorry, major," said Keeche, quietly. "We got you here so you never get out, and we got too little white squaws, too, that belong to the General. What you say to dat, major?"

"Gracious God, Keeche! Are they yet alive?" demanded the major, excitedly. "We thought surely they were all scalped when you took them."

"One was, major," said Keeche, coolly. "I got up in time to get two others. We hab 'um safe, and now we want to trade 'um!"

"Thank God, Keeche, you're not as bad as the rest," said the major, fervently. "What do you want for them, man? I'll give you each a barrel of powder when you come to the fort, and fifty blue blankets."

"No go," interrupted Cochise, coarsely. "No go. White chief much mean; not worth a cuss."

What little English Cochise understood, it will be perceived, had not been learned on Fifth avenue.

Major Morris colored deeply with vexation at the chief's insolence, but he contained himself, as many another gallant officer has been forced to in a similarly helpless position.

"Keeche," he said to the Cheyenne, "tell me how much you want to restore General Davis' daughters back to my care unharmed?"

Keeche-ab-que-kono smiled in a benevolent manner. His face bore a strong resemblance to that of the great Henry Ward Beecher in his saintliest mood, as the Cheyenne chief softly observed:

"White Father very rich. Got plenty guns, plenty powder, plenty wagons. White chief give up all his guns and wagons. Then Ijuns give back the two white girls."

"What! Give up the very train I was ordered to escort to Fort Steadman?" said the major, excitedly. "Keeche, you must think I'm a coward to make such a proposal to me. Give up my train indeed?"

"Dat not all," said Keeche, quietly. "You got to leave train anyhow. We have him safe to-morrow. We want all the guns your men have got, big guns, little guns, and powder. You pile your arms. We give up squaws, and take you back where come from."

In fact, said the major, angrily, "you ask an unconditional surrender of all my force. Well, sir, you won't get it. I could not face my General again, if I ever did such a thing. You can go back, sir. If I tell my men your proposition they'll fire on you now."

"Maybe so they not fire," said the Cheyenne, coolly. "You get shot yourself first, major. We go back. You think better of him to-morrow morning. We bring little squaws down to see you. If so you say give up all, we send you back. If not, you see when happen to him before your eyes."

Without another word the Cheyenne chief turned on his heel and stalked to his horse. Cochise laughed, brutally, and observed:

"Little white squaw nice. Warriors like 'um. Ugh!"

Then he too stalked away, and Red Lightning said, very earnestly:

"You do what Keeche say, major. We like white chief, but must have big guns to fight soldiers. Good-night."

He saluted very politely, and turned away. Major Morris returned to his men in dire perplexity.

The Indians had put him in a fearful dilemma between the duty of a soldier and the feelings of a gentleman, for he had not known to that moment that the two girls under his escort were alive.

On his return, he at once called his officers together, and stated to them the Indian proposition and his fearful alternative.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE USE OF A CUR.

On the same night three men on foot, leading their horses, were slowly emerging from the woods on the west side of the South Park, and ascending the dry bed of a mountain torrent that led up the steep slopes of the Sierra.

They trod cautiously, and seemed to be aware that they were in danger, for not a quarter of a mile off the fires of some outlying Indians were plainly visible.

In front of them ran the little dog Yakop, and the party is therefore easily recognized as our three friends, Somers, Buford and Brinkerhoff. Yakop seemed to be acting as a guide, for the intelligent little creature frequently ran back, as if asking them to

follow him, and always received a kind word from his master.

Before they had gone far up the ravine, the rocks shut out the view of the fires, and then the German spoke to the dog:

"Vat for you go disser ray, Yakop? Is de Ijuns all gone?"

"Wuff!" answered Yakop, as plainly as if he said, "Yes."

"But vat shall we do mit ourselves up hier, Yakop? Dere is nopoty vat life hier, hein?"

"Again Yakop gave a short 'wuff,'" said Carl, admiringly. "He say sometopy life hier, and ein freund, too. You see Yakop he is right before we gets troo."

"But how can we be certain that we don't get caught in the mountains?" asked Somers, anxiously. "Your dog's a wonderful dog, Carl, but he can't know the way out, when he's never been here before."

"Wuff!" said Carl, confidently. "Yakop he got more sense dan all of us put together. You see, mein herr. He tell me, plain as hund can speak, dat dere is vite man up disser berg. I goes dere. You stays behind de Ijuns catches you."

"We had better follow the dog, Jack," said Buford, gravely. "Remember that his scent enables him to distinguish between people. He has probably struck the trail of some white hunter. You know there are some in the mountains, and the dog may be right. We can't be much worse off than in that valley, full of Indians as it is, with every pass occupied. I vote to follow the dog."

"Here Yakop, who had been listening to the conversation as if he understood every word, leaped up on the speaker, wagging his tail; and then went off up the pass, gamboling and frisking, frequently looking back to see if he was followed."

The three friends took up their line of march after the dog in silence, and after a short following so much the easier.

The ravine became narrower and steeper, till it climbed a species of stage in the mountain side, when it ran on, nearly level, for some distance, ending in three diverging canyons, each as black as ink. Into the right hand one of these Yakop ran without hesitation, and the horsemen followed.

The floor of the canyon was smooth, and covered with sand and gravel, which shone white through the darkness and made the task of following so much the easier.

At last, however, their progress was suddenly cut short by a perpendicular wall of rock, which seemed to forbid further advance; and Somers fretfully exclaimed:

"I knew how it would be, following that dog. What are we to do now?"

Carl Brinkerhoff dismounted and looked round.

Yakop had disappeared. The German called him in a low voice several times, and soon they heard the eager panting of his little creature, coming back to them.

"Vat for you fool us disser way, Yakop?" asked Carl, sternly. "How we go to get out of dis hein, you ole fool?"

Yakop gave another "wuff," wagged his tail, and started forward into a deep black cavern in the rock, which they had hitherto not seen in the darkness of the canyon.

Before entering, the German struck a match, and lighted a tiny dark-lantern, which he took from his saddle.

No sooner had he turned his light on the white sand than he said, in a low, eager voice:

"Fellers, we don't got so much sense as Yakop now. Dere be a mule's hoofs, as plain as der sun, mit shoes on too. Now vat you dinks?"

The other two were down in a moment, and beheld the track plainly, but the impressions of the mule's shoes were pointed outward, and Somers observed, coolly:

"I always said that dog was a fool. Here the brute's been taking a back seat, and didn't know any better. This only proves that some one on a mule has come out of here into the valley. We ought to have gone the other way."

"Vell, den, if you likes to go back, you may," said Brinkerhoff, dryly; "but I don't like de mule Ijuns so mosh as all dat. Vere disser feller come from dere, ist no Ijuns, and I goes disser way. You follers if you likes."

So saying, the German advanced into the cavern, throwing his light ahead, where Yakop appeared, trotting forward with his nose down.

After a moment's hesitation the two comrades followed, leading their horses down a long and narrow winding cave, which at times seemed to be open to the sky and at times cleft, at other times widened out into a large cave, shut in above them.

All the while the mule-track appeared at intervals in patches of sand, till at last the eager panting of the mule, and then, emerging on the bare mountain side, having passed right through a gap in the Sierra.

A narrow ledge, forming a sort of irregular staircase up the Sierra, seemed to be the only way ahead.

It was practicable for men on foot, and Yakop seemed to find no difficulty in passing, but the horses, led as they were, took a long time before they mustered courage to follow.

In places the ledge became a ridge not two feet wide, with a sheer precipice on either hand, overlooking a black gulf.

So they toiled along in the darkness for nearly an hour, over the same path which the Rock Rider had traversed on a trot on his sure-footed mule twelve hours before; and at last the dark gorge opened its jaws before them, at the extreme end of which the glimmering red light of a fire was reflected faintly from the portals of the Cavern of Death.

It was midnight when they reached the gorge, and the sight of the red fire puzzled them all, for every thing round was deathly still.

Yakop went trotting quietly up toward the cavern, and the three friends slowly followed, keeping a cautious look-out ahead of them, with rifles poised and cocked.

Nothing occurred to disturb them till they were near the entrance of the outer cavern, when Yakop suddenly stopped, snarling, and at the same moment a dark figure leaped up from the side of the ravine, yelling out:

"Golly sakes albe! Wurra dat! Git out of dis, you mean t'iefs!"

Without the slightest warning Somers was prostrated to the earth, as if struck by a cannon-ball, by the brawny fist of Cato, which knocked him senseless before he could utter a sound.

Then came the flash of a rifle, as Buford,

in the sudden start, let off his gun accidentally; and before Carl Brinkerhoff could collect his senses, he received a blow on the back of the head that sent him headlong to the earth, while Buford was pinioned as if in the grasp of a vise, and Cato's knee struck him in the back like the blow of a trip-hammer. All the breath was knocked out of his body as he came flat down on his back on the hard rock.

Like an angry lion the herculean black leaped upon Carl Brinkerhoff, who had staggered up, confused, and before the German could point his rifle Cato had clasped him in his arms, and was bearing him down.

Then Carl roused all his strength, which was also tremendous; and white and black rolled over and over on the ground, tugging and straining at each other in grim bulldog silence, while Yakop danced about outside, snarling, watching his opportunity to snap at Cato's heels.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CONJUROR'S PLAN.

How long the struggle between Brinkerhoff and Cato might have lasted, and which would have finally conquered, is uncertain, for both were men of herculean strength and nearly equally matched, while Somers and Buford had been effectually put out of the fight by the sudden attack of the negro, and were incapable of helping their friend.

In the very height of the struggle, when both were panting for breath, the sharp ring of hoofs at a trot came up the glen, and the deep voice of the Rock Rider shouted:

"What ails you all here? What's the matter, Cato?"

In a moment the black wrenched himself away from Carl's grasp; the latter being nowise loth to release him; and draw a pistol.

Then the German covered the figure of the Rock Rider with his weapon, and vociferated:

"You keeps back now, or I shoots you! Tausend teufels! Vat sort of beoples is dis, dot lifes hier? I dinks dey must be crazy!"

"Brinkerhoff, is it thou?" cried the familiar voice of Belcour. "How in Heaven's name came you here?"

And the light form of the youth sprang down from the croup of the gaunt mule, where he had been sitting behind the Rock Rider.

"Oh! marse cappen, is dat you?" bel-lowed Cato. "Ise so glad you come. Ise been fightin' wit free ghostesses, an' I isn't no coward, marse cappen. Glory be to God!"

"Vas in der teufel's name ist al disser?" demanded Carl, in amazement. "How you kommen hier, and vas ist das man on der mule?"

"I'll tell thee in good time," said Belcour, lastly. "But where are Somers and Buford, and what were you all fighting about?"

"Mein Gott, how should I know?" said Brinkerhoff, ruefully. "Wir kommen up hier, all on der tiptoe, und das nigger he slump out, und he hit me in crack on der kopf, und send me flying. Den he knock down Somers und Buford in a minute, und wir begin to fight, und das ist all, till you two fellers comes."

Belcour began to laugh.

"Well, well! do you know that you have been fighting with the servant of our best friend? But, by Heaven, he seems to have killed Buford and Somers."

"Not quite, but very near it," said the faint voice of Buford, as he sat up. "You've got strange friends, I must say, Belcour. That nigger's as strong as a bull, and I believe he's broken my back."

"Oh, marse cappen," said the voice of Cato, "Ise done gone and done it; sah, dolly, how dem fellers 'dropped'! Yah! yah!"

"Peace!" said the deep voice of the Rock Rider, who now spoke for the first time. "You did right to guard the cave, but you struck too quick. These gentlemen are my friends."

"Oh, de Lord, marse cappen, how's I to know dat?" said Cato. "Hyar we lib all de time, and nebber see a soul. How I know dat dem's you fien's, come snoopin' round hyar, dis time of night? Why they no call out, to let ole Cato know dem's comin'?"

Gentlemen, Ise very sorry de feller hurt ye, seain, ye's ole marse cappen's fien's, but what's a nigger to do when he can't see ye, and dem murderin' Ijuns all round, jess as thick's flies on a dead mule? But Ise mortal sorry, Ise shuah. Hyar, marse, I'll pick up de little gemman what I knock down, and I'll bring him in."

And the kind-hearted negro picked up the insensible Somers in his arms, and bore him into the cavern, while the three comrades, so strangely met, followed behind, listening to the courteous words of the Rock Rider.

Gentlemen, I regret exceedingly the unfortunate mistake of my awkward servant, which I beg you to excuse. Cato is a faithful fellow, but I have found it very difficult to teach him manners, and he had the excuse of not knowing who you were. I hope your friend will not be found materially injured. I will see to his cure myself. And now, gentlemen, allow me to welcome you to the poor habitation that time and ruin have left to a gentleman who once had the honor to draw a sword in the service of his country. Your friend, Monsieur Belcour, met me accidentally in the Sierra to-day, and I rejoice at the opportunity of seeing you. And now, gentlemen, enter my castle and be welcome."

And the gaunt figure stalked in before them to where Cato was already putting on fresh wood to a fire in the outer cave.

The portals of the Cavern of Death were black and silent, and no traces were visible of its ghastly occupants.

Buford and Brinkerhoff gazed with surprise upon the gaunt figure of the Rock Rider, as he stood thoughtfully by the fire, leaning on his lance, with the pinched white female face on the round shield staring at them from his sightless eyes.

Belcour had become used to him during their ride, but the other two were full of amazement. Every thing in the cavern, from the Rock Rider to Black Cato, was weird and uncouth.

Somers, under the care of Cato, slowly recovered his senses, and stared round him in a confused manner, not knowing where he was.

Then the Rock Rider, suddenly turning round, said:

"Gentlemen, we are five, resolute, well-armed men, and in the valley are two delicate girls, tenderly nurtured, who were

taken prisoners to-day by the most merciless men on earth to women. I have suffered from those men myself in former years, but I could forgive them all, if they would only spare those women. Gentlemen, what say you? Who will follow the Rock Rider to rescue two Christian ladies from the power of the heathen?"

"I will go, monsieur," said Gustave, simply. "We will all go, if need be."

"How you know dat de leedle kirls haf been taken by de Ijuns?" asked Carl Brinkerhoff, cautiously. Carl was not an enthusiast.

"I saw them captured myself, sir," said the Rock Rider. "And he told them of the attack, the runaway ambulance, the slain woman, and the captive girls, in short, nervous words."

"Den dot's vat ve see disser morgen," said Carl, reflectively. "ven ve ron so like der teufel. It vas de Ijuns, catchin' de leedle kirls. Vell, fellers, I goes mit you. I likes de leedle kirls, und I feels al de Ijuns in de fallay, so I gets dem pack to deir faders und mothers."

"It is settled," said the Rock Rider, solemnly. "To-morrow morning we will go forth, and we betide the tribes of the valley if they refuse to give up the maidens. Who will get out alive is a different matter."

"Stay!" said Belcour, suddenly. "I have an idea. If we all go, we are too many for craft, too few for strength. I, monsieur, am a conjuror, and you seem to be a person of influence among the Indians. I propose that we go together, and try to obtain these girls by artifice. We have not far to carry them, only to the camp of their friends, who have beaten off the Indians, but lost their horses. Well then, let one of us, the best mounted, ride through the passes and go to Denver for help. No doubt monsieur here will show us the way to do that. They will send troops and horses, we shall break off the Indians, save the ladies, and all be happy. What do you say to that, my friends?"

"The plan is good," said the universal response, as all the salutes of mutual esteem were given.

Whether it was feasible, the next day would decide. (To be continued.—Commenced in No. 145.)

Shot with a Pack-saddle.

BY A. GOULD PENN, ESQ.

Old Jonas Mills was one of the early pioneers in what is now the great Buckeye State. At what time he left his Virginia home and floated down the Ohio is not recorded in the family history, but as early as 1798 his little cabin stood in a clearing, a few miles from the north bank of the river.

His only companion was a son, James, all that remained to him of a once numerous family, and together they had taken a quarter section of land, and proceeded to farm it in the rude manner of those early days.

The necessities of life were few and easily obtained, but of luxuries they were deficient, unless salt be classed as such, and this only could be obtained by great trouble. Some fifty miles from their cabin, near a stream, called to this day Salt Creek, were numerous salt wells, which were operated by the general Government, and supplied the settlers of all that region and the frontier troops.

One fine morning James was notified by his father that he must go to Salt Creek for a supply of salt, so, putting an old pack-saddle on his horse, he struck off into the wilderness, with his trusty rifle on his shoulder. Without molestation from beasts or Indians, he arrived at the salt works, and made his purchases, and in due time prepared for his journey home.

"Hello! what's my pack-saddle?" he exclaimed, on finding that article missing.

Thereupon he instituted a diligent search among the workmen, but without success, until finally he was slyly informed by a young girl who lived at the settlement that the workmen had stolen his saddle, and burned it under the salt kettles.

This piece of information aroused Jimmy's anger not a little, but deeming that a fuss with the reckless salt-boilers would not be desirable, he mounted his horse, using his sack of salt for a saddle, and struck out for home in a very gracious mood.

It had been customary with old Jonas and his son to make these trips alternately, and when next a new supply of salt was needed Jimmy begged of his father to relieve him of his turn, to which the old man consented. So he set about making preparations, prepared his outfit as usual, strapping their only remaining pack-saddle on the horse.

Arriving at Salt Creek, in due season, he proceeded with his business, not noticing the smiles and winks that passed among the boilers, who had a lively recollection of the old pack-saddle. But, Jimmy was calm and innocent, and seemingly had forgotten his former misfortune, inasmuch as he took no care to conceal his pack-saddle from the mischievous boilers.

Jimmy made free to call on the black-eyed girl who had treated him so kindly before, and was passing the time very agreeably when, "whizz bang!" a crash as if a bomb had burst near them, startled them to their feet.

Everybody rushed to the scene, which proved to be an explosion beneath one of the huge salt-kettles.

Jimmy knew the cause, and astonished the already amazed bystanders by peals of laughter.

"Whoop—ee!" yelled he, jumping about, slapping his hands on his knees, and roaring with laughter.

"Whoop—ee! ha! ha! I say, fellers, salt has riz, ain't it? ha! ha! ha! can't ye lend me a pack-saddle, boys, to ride home on? You've shot yourselves with mine!"

 Unanswered questions on hand will appear next week

THE WINTER ROSES.

BY HARRY J. HOLT.

The winter roses sweetly bloom
At the window in my room;
Filling all the heated air
With their fragrance soft and rare.

As the chilling snow comes down
On the housetop like a crown,
And the frost, the crystal rain
Borders every window pane,

I then seek my little room,
Where those fragrant roses bloom—
Where the golden sunshine plays
Through the short and wintry days.

Thus should ever blush and glow
Through the frost and through the snow,
Through the rime and mold of art,
The balmy roses of the heart.

The winter roses! Let them bloom,
Gentle maidens in your room;
Mother, Sister, Friend and Wife,
Let them bloom throughout your life.

A Strange Girl:
A NEW ENGLAND LOVE STORY.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

AUTHOR OF "THE WOLF DEMON," "OVERLAND
KIP," "RED MURDER," "ACE OF SPADES,"
"HEART OF FIRE," "WITCHES OF
NEW YORK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LYDIA'S SECRET.

In a little, low one-story cottage in the outskirts of Saco, on the Portland road, dwelt Dinah Salisbury; Aunt Dinah, as she was known far and wide.

Our readers will remember her as the colored woman with the "yaller" dog who rescued Lydia Grame from her snowy shroud in the streets of Boston, as related in our first chapter.

Aunt Dinah made a comfortable living as a washerwoman, and the careful housewives of the twin cities praised her skill highly.

The old woman, her daily toil done, had just sat down to enjoy a cup of tea, when the dog, who had been quietly reposing on the hearth in front of the stove, raised his head, looked toward the door, and by his actions indicated as plainly as by words, that some one was coming.

"Somebody comin' eh?" the old woman questioned, rising from her seat. The dog wagged his tail at the sound of his mistress' voice.

"It's somebody that the dog knows for sure, or he'd done bark long ago," the old woman said, reflectively.

Then there came a gentle tap at the door. The old aunt opened it and Lydia Grame entered.

"Bress de Lord!" the old woman cried, in delight; "why, chile, is dat you?" And the dog rose from his place by the hearth and came up to Lydia, wagging his tail in token of amity.

The girl was dressed plainly; a dark waterproof cloak covered her form from head to foot, and she wore a light chip hat, sailor-fashion.

"I thought that I would come and see you, aunty," Lydia said, and there was a troubled expression upon her beautiful face as she spoke.

"Dat's right, chile; I see glad dat you hain't forgotten yer old aunty," the old woman said, reflectively.

"I have too few friends to forget any of them," the girl spoke sadly.

"Lor, honey, ye musn't speak dat way!" rejoined the old woman, caressingly. "You got more friends dan any oder gal dat works in de mill. Everybody likes you, chile. But, I speeks you's in trouble, honey; yer don't look well. Jis' sit down an' take a cup of tea, an' tell yer ole aunty w'at's de matter wid ye."

And the old woman, bustling about the room, placed a chair for the girl at the table. Lydia sat down, first removing her cloak and hat. It was plain from the expression upon the girl's features that she was much troubled.

"I've had supper, aunty," she said, as the old woman poured out a cup of tea for her.

"Nebber mind dat, chile; jis' you drink a cup of yer aunty's tea. Yer don't get such tea as dat everywhar, an' jes' try a bit of dat toast. See how glad dat fool dog is to see you! I nebber see'd any ting like dat afore." And the old woman laughed heartily as she beheld the dog frisking around the visitor, eager to receive a friendly word from her.

"Poor doggie," Lydia said, patting the dog's shaggy head with her soft, white hand. The dumb brute's joy at seeing her made the heart of the girl feel less wretched. The cold touch of the animal's nose, rubbing against her hand seemed full of sympathy.

"Now, honey, jes' you tole me w'at de matter is," the old negro persisted, sitting down to the table opposite to the girl.

"I hardly know how to tell you, aunty," she said, after a few moments of thought.

"Don't be skeered now, chile, for to tell yer old aunty all 'bout it. I've lived a heap of years longer in dis world dan you have, an' I phaps I kin help yer out."

"Aunty, I am very miserable!" Lydia exclaimed, impulsively.

"W'at's come to yer, chile?" asked the old woman, in astonishment.

"Aunty, I want you to advise me what to do. I can speak freely to you, for you are the only friend that I have in the world. But for you I should have died in the snow-bank where you found me in Boston. Perhaps it would have been better for me to die, instead of bringing me here," the girl said, impulsively, tears standing in the large dark eyes, and a look of misery plainly written on her features.

"Why, chile!" cried the old woman, in horror, "you musn't talk dat way; dat's wicked, dat is! A young gal like you to want to die! Lordy! dat's ag'in natur." Now, honey, you musn't talk like dat ag'in."

"But, aunty, I am so miserable," the girl rejoined, sadly.

"W'at's de matter, chile? Has yer quarreled wid yer young man?" asked the old woman, shrewdly.

A little red spot came into Lydia's pale cheeks, and she let her gaze rest on the floor for a moment.

"Why don't you say, chile? You ain't afraid to trust yer old aunty, are yer?"

"No, no," Lydia replied, quickly; "but how did you know that any gentleman was paying attentions to me?"

"Lordy, chile, de folks round hyer will talk, ye know."

"And do they say that any gentleman is paying attentions to me?"

"Is specks they do; I heerd 'em."

"And who was the gentleman?"

"Dat Sinclair Paxton, honey, an' he ain't no poor white trash," the old woman said, emphatically.

For a few moments Lydia was silent; as she had suspected, Sinclair's attentions to her had been noticed, and already people had begun to couple their names together.

"And do they say that a rich man like Mr. Paxton thinks of marrying a poor girl like myself?" she asked.

"Yes, honey. Yer ain't had a quarrel wid him?"

"No, no, but it is to ask your advice in regard to Mr. Paxton that I came to see you to-night."

"Dat's right, honey; I'll do de best I kin for you," the old woman observed, encouragingly.

"Mr. Paxton has been very kind to me ever since I came to the mill; he is the treasurer there, you know?"

The old woman nodded.

"And he has told me that he loves me and that he wishes me to become his wife."

"Dat's w'at I'd like to see, honey!" the old woman exclaimed, exultantly. "Pore de Lord! I'd walk a hundred miles far to see dat!"

"But, aunty, suppose I can not be his wife?"

Dinah stared at her for a moment in astonishment.

"Why not, chile? dat's w'at I'd like to know?"

"He is a rich man while I am only a poor girl."

"Dat's nuffin'—dat don't count, nohow!"

"But, if there is another reason?" Lydia added, and then she hesitated as if undecided whether to go on or stop. Then with a sudden movement, she set her lips tight together for a moment and the look of hesitation vanished.

"Aunty, I must speak plainly with you, for you are the only one in this world to whom I can go for counsel. There is a reason why I should not marry Sinclair Paxton. There is a man living, who, if I married Mr. Paxton, would hold me absolutely in his power. I should be his slave, obliged to do his will, and if my husband by any chance should happen to discover my unhappy secret, he might drive me from him with curses—with loathing, and I should deserve to be so treated."

"Bress de Lord, chile!" exclaimed the old woman, in astonishment, "I don't understand dis yer."

"And I can not fully explain, except that there is a dark secret connected with my early life. It was that secret pressing on my brain and driving me almost to madness that made me seek death in the snow-bank from which you rescued me. Now, aunty, I'll tell you what I came to ask. This man who possesses such a terrible hold upon me, knows of Mr. Paxton's love for me. He has offered that if I will give him a certain sum of money he will go away, so that I can marry Mr. Paxton, and promised that I shall never see him again. Now, aunty, is it right for me to do this—to marry this gentleman, knowing as I do, that if this man does not keep his word and should return, I doom both my husband and myself to a lifetime of misery?"

"An' can't yer tell Mister Paxton all 'bout dis yer thing?" the old woman asked, thoughtfully.

"No, I can not tell him, for if he knew my secret, our marriage would be impossible," Lydia replied, slowly.

"Don't you have nuffin' to do wid him, then, honey; dat ain't right; dat ain't 'ord' to de Good Book; don't you do it, chile!" the negro said, decidedly.

"That is what my own heart has told me a hundred times, but I am so weak, so irresolute, and this man loves me so well. When I am with him I think that I could dare every thing—risk all for his sake!" Lydia said, hurriedly and in strange excitement.

"Don't you do it, honey! Act fa'r an' squar'; dat's de only way to git along in dis yer world."

"You are right! He must forget me and I must forget him, and may Heaven give us both strength to bear our cross. Well, I must say good-by, aunty," and Lydia rose and put on her things. "I must go, now. It is getting dark, and it is a long way home."

"Come again soon, honey."

"Yes, yes," and Lydia hurried away. On her homeward walk she passed by the Paxton mansion. A single glance she gave at the house, almost hid by the gloom of the evening, and then hurried on again, her face as white and stony as the face of a marble statue.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DADDY EMBEDEN'S GHOST.

When the buggy, driven by Nathan, drew up in front of the Embenden mansion, the old man was so completely unnerved, that Nathan had to take him from the carriage as if he had been a child.

Delia had been on the look-out for her father's return, and when the buggy halted, she came out on the steps.

"Oh, father, you are sick!" she said.

"No, I ain't sick," he muttered slowly, as, with the aid of her arm, he tottered, with unsteady steps, into the house. Nathan followed close behind.

Delia led the old man into the sitting-room, placed him in an arm-chair, then in response to Nathan's beckoning hand, she came to the door which led into the hall where the hired man stood.

"What is the matter with father?" she asked, sorely troubled at the condition of the old man.

"Wal, Delie, it's hard to say," Nathan replied, slowly. "I drove up to the deacon's house, and got there jest about nine, jest as you tole me. And arter I got there, I thought I had better go into the house and let your father know that I was there. So I got out of the wagon, and I walked into the yard. I tumbled over somethin' all curled into a heap on the ground. I thought fust that it was some feller who had been drinking too much rum and had straggled into the deacon's yard to sleep it off. But when I came to examine, I found that it was your father. I got him into the buggy and he talked all the time as crazy as a bed-bug; I couldn't make head nor tail of it at fust, but arter we drove on a spell, I found out that he thought that he had seen a 'ghost.'"

"A ghost?" cried the girl in wonder.

"Sartin! a ghost wrapped up in a mill-tary cloak and wearing a straw hat."

"But did he see any thing?"

"Wal, now, fust off, I thought mebbe that he had seen somebody passing in the street, who looked like somebody that he

once knew, and who was dead. But arter we got over the bridge and was coming up the hill, he dropped down in a faint ag'in, and when I roused him out of it, he said that he had seen the ghost ag'in."

"But did you see any thing?"

"Not a thing; and when I found out what ailed him, I jumped right out of the buggy and went back, but I couldn't see any thing at all, except a couple of girls standing talking on a corner of the street."

"Then you think that father did not really see any thing, and that the ghost is only in his imagination?" the girl asked, thoughtfully.

"That's jest what I think. I don't believe in ghosts, anyway; I never seed but one, and that turned out to be dad's white cow."

"Oh, what shall I do with him?" cried the girl, wringing her hands in despair.

"Wal, if I was you, now, Delie," Nathan said, confidentially, "the fust thing I'd do would be to go and mix him up a stiff, hot rum punch. Your daddy's been a sailor, you know, and hot rum comes kinder natural to 'em. Then I'd get him off to bed."

"Yes, I will do so."

"I'll put the horse up, then I'll come in and talk to him; but I tell you he's as cranky as all git-out."

Then Nathan departed, while Delia returned to her father.

The old man was sitting in the easy-chair, with his head resting on the table, and hidden by his hands.

"Don't you feel well, father?" the girl asked, approaching and kneeling down by his chair.

With a nervous motion, Embden raised his head and looked carefully around the room before he spoke.

"I'm sick at heart, Delie; that's where I'm sick," he said, slowly.

"Shan't I mix you some hot rum, father?"

"Yes, yes," he replied, quickly; "I want somethin' to steady my nerves; I'm only a wrack, now."

So Delia went and prepared the hot drink, which the old man sipped eagerly.

"That's what your mother used to fix up for me," he said, slowly and reflectively, while a tear stood in his eye. "Many's the squally night I've managed to run in after a hard northeast blow and found your mother sitting up and waiting for me. If she had only lived I never would have done it; but the devil fished for my soul; he baited his hook with a great lot of money, and he caught me, poor sinner that I am. The deacon says, too, that I'll roast in hell-fire. Oh Lord!" and the old man groaned aloud in misery.

The girl had listened in utter amazement to the strange words which had fallen from her father's lips.

"Why, father, how could the deacon say such a cruel thing as that of you?" she asked in wonder.

"He didn't know that it was me, Delie," the old man moaned. "The deacon has known me man and boy for forty year. He never knew me to wrong anybody out of a penny. The Biddford folks used to say, 'Skipper Embden's a hard man at a bargain, but he's honest to a cent, and only wants w'at's coming to him. There wasn't a man, woman or child from Boston to the Kennebec that wouldn't trust the skipper of the Nancy Jane'; they wouldn't believe now that I was a thief, and a red-handed murderer."

"Oh, father!" cried the girl with tears in her eyes, "you mustn't say such dreadful things."

"But it's truth, gal. Oh, I'm a dreadful man!" and Embden moaned in agony.

"Now, father, don't speak that way," Delia said, caressingly, "why, if any one should hear you speak like that they would surely think that you were crazy."

"Oh, if I could only think so!" the old man muttered. "If I could only make myself believe that I was crazy on that dreadful night. Oh, how it all comes back to me. I kin see it now, jist as plain as I did then. Arter he was dead, he followed me down the river, and as I looked over the stern, I seed him a-floating on his back, and a-staring up at me, as much as to say, 'I'll never leave you, and he never has, really, for I see him all the time, no matter where I am.'"

"Why don't you try and think of something else, father?" the girl said, coaxingly.

"Yes, I know," the old man said, shaking his head sorrowfully. "You think that I don't know what I'm talking about, but I do; I ain't crazy. The deacon knew that I wasn't crazy. He knelt down and prayed for me, poor sinner that I am. I felt better arter I heerd him pray. It kinder lifted my soul up. I kinder thought how my mother used to pray for me when I was running round, a barefooted boy. It's putty hard for a God-fearing man, who has lived an honest life for forty years, to turn all of a sudden into a pesky villain. The deacon says I must give it all up, and so I will, but, oh, Lord! I can't bring back the life that's gone. We can take it away, but we can't restore it."

"Now, father, try and don't talk this way," and the girl smoothed back the bristly hair of the old man caressingly.

"I know you think I'm wrong; Nathan thought that I was crazy to-night when I said that I saw it on the street."

"What father?"

"The ghost."

"But whose ghost?"

"Why, the man who floated down the Rappahannock."

All this was a mystery to the girl. One thing only was plain to her, and that was that her father was laboring under the pressure of a strong mental excitement.

"Was the man dead?"

"Yes, of course he was dead; he couldn't a-float if he hadn't been dead."

"And you saw him to-night?"

"Jest as plain as I see you, Delie," the old man said, solemnly. "I was coming out of the deacon's house, half-way 'cross the yard, mebbe, and I happened to raise my eyes and look out into the street over the gate, and there he stood, jist the other side of the gate. He was a-looking at me—right straight at me—and his face was jest as pale as death, and his eyes they looked like great balls of fire. He never moved a mite, only stood and looked at me."

"And you are sure, father, that it wasn't somebody passing by who happened to bear a resemblance to the person whom you think it was? It was dark, wasn't it, father?"

"Yes, a leetle dark."

"Well, in the dark you might have made a mistake."

"Yes, but I saw it again, Delie," he said, not at all convinced.

"When was that?"

"Arter we crossed the bridge, and was driving up the hill. I was a-looking 'round 'cos I thought that he would foller me, and jest as we were going up the hill, he came right out of a dark shadow, right side of the buggy, rose, you know, as ghosts do, right out of the air."

"But, what became of him?" the girl asked, unable to decide whether her father was laboring under a delusion or not.

"I don't know," the old man said, doubtfully; "I went down all in a heap at the bottom of the buggy."

"But Nathan said that he got out and then couldn't see any thing or anybody."

"Cos I'm the only one it appears to. Everybody can't see ghosts. It's only wretched sinners like I am," and the old man groaned in bitterness of spirit.

(To be continued—commenced in No. 140.)

OLD SOLITARY,
The Hermit Trapper:OR,
THE DRAGON OF SILVER LAKE.

BY OLL COOMES.

AUTHOR OF "HAWKEYE HARRY," "BOY SPY,"
"IRONSIDES," "THE SCOUT," "DEATH-NOTCH,"
"THE DESTROYER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BAND OF HORSEMEN.

OVER the great plain, and down toward the settlement of Mound Prairie, galloped a band of horsemen at a breakneck speed. Their half-nude forms, their painted faces and plumed heads told that they were a band of savage warriors with mischief in their hearts, for their faces were streaked and ringed with war paint until they appeared like very demons of hideousness.

They bestrode strong-limbed mustang ponies, and were armed with rifle, tomahawk and scalping-knife.

They galloped furiously on until at length they gained the summit of a swell in the prairie, from whence Mound Prairie and the oak openings were just discernible away to the southward.

The Sioux chieftain drew rein, and his band, numbering a score and ten, followed his example.

"Look away yonder, my braves," he said, pointing toward the settlement, "you will see the wigwams of the pale-faces nestled in among the groves where the red-man used to take the deer."

"The scalp of a pale-face," replied a giant savage, "is worth more than the skin of a deer."

"Yes, yes, Great Wolf," replied the chief, "but we must not trouble the settlers there yet. We must have the scalp of the Hermit Trapper first, for he is a foe to be feared more than a score of the pale-face settlers. When we get his scalp, then will Waucosta lead his warriors upon Mound Prairie, for there dwells his heart in the breast of a pale-face lily, whose name is Mildred. And by her side grows a stately rose, whose name is Ethel, and who would make bright the lodge of Great Wolf. These flowers has Waucosta seen while lying concealed among the bushes in the Oak Openings."

"Waucosta is a great chief," returned the great savage giant; "it is because he has the heart of the red-man within the breast of a white man."

There was a momentary silence, during which time the savages feasted their eyes upon the distant settlement like birds of prey gathering strength and courage to swoop down upon the unsuspecting quarry.

At length Waucosta headed his animal northward, and said—in plain English—which told that he was a white man:

"Let us push on for the lake and the White Hermit's scalp."

The whole party turned and rode away in single file, in a slow, easy gallop.

They rode on in silence for several hours, and at last the timber bordering on the lake burst upon their view.

Never halting, they galloped on. They reached the timber. Here they slackened their pace, but continued on until they had reached a dark and densely-wooded valley, a mile or more north of the lake, where they came to a halt and dismounted.

Hitching their animals under a dense clump of trees, the warriors gathered in a group near by.

"We are now less than an hour's ride from the wigwam of the White Hermit," said Waucosta; "does Great Wolf still say he will bear the message of Black Buffalo to him?"

"Great Wolf is not a coward. He has promised the chief to bear his message to the Hermit Trapper, and he will do it."

Let Great Wolf be careful, for the Hermit is a powerful warrior," said Waucosta. "And the strength of Great Wolf is like the panther's," said the self-conceited giant, "his equal does not walk these hunting-grounds."

"Then let Great Wolf be off for the Hermit Trapper's wigwam. Tell him that he must leave our hunting-grounds. If he refuses to go, bring his scalp, and then will Great Wolf have won the honors of a war-chief."

Great Wolf arose to go. He adjusted his weapons, some fresh scalps that dangled at his girdle, and drew his blanket close about his shoulders. All these preparations seemed to have been an excuse for delay. There was an air of hesitation about him, and his facial muscles moved and twitched as though he wanted to say something, yet was in doubt as to the manner in which it would be construed by his companions. At length, however, he said:

"There will be much plunder at the wigwam of the Hermit Trapper; had not a warrior better go with Great Wolf to help bring it away?"

"Yes, let Great Wolf pick his warrior," replied Waucosta, and the shadow of a smile hovered about his lips, for he saw that Great Wolf was afraid to go alone to the trapper's cabin.

The savage selected his companion—a small, wiry fellow, with eyes like daggers—and took his departure for the trapper's cabin.

While waiting his return, Waucosta and one of his warriors shouldered their rifles and moved away toward the lake in search of game for supper.

On reaching a point overlooking the water, they were not a little surprised to see a column of smoke drifting up from among the treetops on the eastern side of the lake. They knew that some one, either friend or foe, was encamped there. But, as an Indian never permits himself to linger in doubt, the two began a careful reconnaissance of the vicinity.

Keeping within the densest portion of the woods, Waucosta crept toward the camp-fire, guided in his course by the ascending smoke. He moved on and on, and at last came in sight of the camp. He was not a little surprised to see seven white men seated around the fire.

As he ran his eyes hastily from face to face, an involuntary cry suddenly burst from his lips when his gaze fell upon the features of Captain Roland Dishrover.

He apparently recognized the captain's face, and yet he scanned his form and features as if in doubt. But at length he seemed to have settled the matter of identity, and gave himself up to a moment's reflection, in which the evil workings of his mind were expressed by the nervous twitching of the facial muscles.

At length, as a grim smile that expressed some evil determination at heart, swept over his paint-bedaubed visage, he arose, and stealing his way back to where his companion was in waiting, proceeded with hasty footsteps to his camp in the valley.

His warriors saw at once, by the expression of his face, that his absence from camp had been attended with something of an unusual character; and in this they were not in fault, for, without questioning, Waucosta acquainted them with the discovery he had made of their close proximity to a party of hunters.

"When night comes and Great Wolf has returned, then will we go over to the lake and capture the pale-face hunters. But they must be taken alive. Let my braves all remember this."

A murmur of general satisfaction passed from lip to lip among the warriors, and their eyes glowed with a fierce joy in the eager anticipation of the coming night's work. With restless gaze they scanned the western sky. The sun hung just above the treetops. It would soon go down. Another hour and it would be dark.

But, ere half of that time had elapsed, a strange figure came from the gathering shadows of twilight, and paused in their midst. It was Great Wolf, though his face was so disfigured that it could not be recognized. Only the tall form and peculiar clothing told them that it was Great Wolf.

The lifeless form of his companion was lashed to his back. His hands were bound

Short wings put out from each side of the monster, and lent an additional terror to its dragon-like appearance. But these wings were used as propellers, as a fish uses its fins, and much on the same principle that an aquatic fowl uses its web-feet in swimming. When the wings had spent their force against the water, they would close, disappear under the surface of the water, and instantly appear forward, when they would again spread out, strike the water like oars, and again disappear under the surface and appear, like a sudden flash, forward for a new stroke.

It was a terrible creature, and as it shot forward toward the savages its body elevating the waves like a sharp prow of a boat, and the water fairly foaming in its wake, it was a sight well calculated to strike terror to the heart of the superstitious savage. Even the whites were held spell-bound with a species of wonder and horror, at sight of the wonderful monster with its glowing eyes and yawning mouth.

Some of them clutched their rifles as if to shoot the dragon, while detective Dart, as if under the influence of some horrible fascination, glided to the water's very edge, and leaning forward, supported by a bush, gazed with starting eyeballs at the creature.

Waucosta, being a white man, and possessed of less superstition than his savage comrades, recovered in a moment his sudden terror, and raising his rifle, fired upon the advancing monster. But his aim was unsteady, or else the creature was invulnerable to bullets, for it still came on.

Possessed now with terror, the renegade chief seized the paddle and attempted to turn the canoe and seek safety in flight. But just as he had turned the craft in a course at right angles with that of the monster, the breast of the latter struck the side of the canoe. There was a crash, the side of the frail bark craft was stove in, and the next moment the savages were flooding in the water, while the monster, sinking downward almost from view, glided away and was soon lost from the sight of our friends in the darkness along the shore.

It required but a minute for the terrified savages to reach the shore and plunge into the dense shadow of the forest, and then our friends realized a feeling of relief—relief from the terrible silence that had been imposed upon them.

"Ay, friend Dart," said Captain Disbrow, "what do you think of that?"

"Quite a drama, quite a drama, Cap. But any thing I ever saw, and I don't try one's nerves," replied the detective, betraying some excitement, which, however, seemed feigned. "That monster is a terrible thing—a creature unknown to zoologists of this age. Quite a wonder, quite a terror. Ha! ha! but didn't it make those savages get up and dust?"

"Yes; it seemed to have a withering effect on their nerves," replied young Harry Thomas.

"I presume," said Captain Disbrow, "they will not venture back in this neighborhood soon again; but by Jupiter! we came within an ace of getting our hair lifted by those skulking rascals. But, then, a miss is as good as a mile, so we may as well adjourn to our camp."

So saying, the party returned to the camp. The fire was replenished with fuel, and the little party again seated themselves within its cheerful glow. The monster of the Lake now furnished a theme for conversation. The detective expressed his opinion freely in regard to it, and argued with ability that it was a species of the monster, Saurians, such as those whose remains are found by geological researchers in the Eocene Period, or Age of Reptiles.

And so the conversation ran on until the party were suddenly startled by the sound of footsteps and a strong, coarse voice.

"Tickle my ole scalp, if you ain't a like set of fars to have your scalps on, when the red hounds of Satan are swimmin' thick hereabouts."

"Old Solitary, as I live!" exclaimed Captain Disbrow, advancing with extended hand to meet the old trapper, "right glad am I to meet you—heavens, man! don't crush my hand in your iron fingers!"

"Wal, my boys," said the old trapper, dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground, and clasping his hands over the muzzle of the piece, which he leaned slightly forward upon, "what s'prises me is to see you squatin' here, in camp, with yer har' all on."

"I suppose our safety is owing to the monster of the Lake," said Harry Thomas.

"The monster! What have you seen that cratter to night?"

"Yes," replied Thomas, "less than an hour ago."

"The dickens, you say! That monster makes the ice rattle down a feller's back like a rattlesnake!"

"A friend of mine," Old Solitary, Jabez Dart, of Ohio, detective by profession," said Captain Disbrow, "right glad am I to meet you—heavens, man! don't crush my hand in your iron fingers!"

"I'm your man!" exclaimed Dart, springing to his feet, and taking up the rifle with which he had been provided at Mound Prairie; "lead the way, Mr. Solitary, and if I get lost just whistle!"

"Whistle?" reiterated the trapper. "Now, Pizen, if you don't want to lose your har', don't speak above a whisper after we are outen sight of that fire. Mind ye, we can't go callin' to one another like a couple of children huntin' posies in the woods of Ohio. No s'ree; you must step like a cat, fur we're a couple of hunters, goin' out arter scalps."

"Lead the way, Solitary, lead the way," returned Dart, impatiently.

The old trapper took the lead, closely followed by the light-footed detective, leaving the other six seated before the fire, their sides convulsed with suppressed laughter over the trapper's advice and the blunt remarks of the detective.

The two moved slowly until some distance from the camp, then they quickened their footsteps, and after journeying a couple of hundred yards, they pushed their way through a dense thicket and entered a little glade, where it was so light that the rays of the moon seemed to have concentrated there in a focus.

Walking to the center of this opening, Old Solitary stopped, and, turning about, dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground, and gazing down upon the detective—who seemed a pigmy by the side of him—said, in a slow, decided tone:

"And you are Jabez Dart, the detective, eh?"

The detective made no reply, more than to draw a slip of paper from an inner pocket and hand it to the trapper.

"Do you know that?" Dart asked.

The old woodman took the paper and gazed at the scrawling writing upon it, with that innocent, childlike ignorance of one who does not know one letter from another.

"Read it, Dart," he said, passing it back to the detective; "then I can tell more about it."

Dart took the paper and read as follows:

"Jabez Dart—Come at once, to Silver Lake, in the Territory of Iowa, and you will hear something in regard to the Har's Ford murder."

"That's it," said the trapper, "that's it." And now what do you know about the Har's Ford murder?" questioned Dart.

"Sh! silence!" to the shadows! "I hear footsteps!" demanded the trapper, and leading the way, they glided across the opening and into the deep shadows.

Here they listened. They heard the tread of a heavy foot.

"Is it a savage?" asked Dart, in a whisper.

"Not a bit of it, Pizen. An Angin walks like a cat, and wears moccasins, but that feller treads like a buck, and's got boots on."

"Verily!" returned Dart, in his careless manner.

"Yes, and tickle my scalp if I don't follow him, and see who it is, and what he's goin'." Stay right here, Pizen, till I return.

"So, so—all right."

And Jabez Dart was alone.

CHAPTER X.

AN ARROW IN CAMP.

AFTER Old Solitary and Jabez Dart left the camp, Captain Disbrow and his party remained until that ease and fearlessness that comes of a sense of security.

For, since the old trapper had made his appearance at their camp, all dangers seemed to have vanished.

But this they soon found was really not the case. Something whizzed through the air and struck with a dull thud, the tree trunk against which Captain Disbrow was reclining.

"By Heavens! this beats me!" returned the captain.

"No doubt of it," replied the Indian, in a tone tinged with sarcasm, "no doubt of it. But time is precious, captain, and I want to have a talk with you about old times. You need not start, captain; no one will hear us."

"Say what you have to say, for I must return to camp," replied the captain, a little restless.

"Rest easy, captain; it's a long time till morning. I'm in a hurry, too, but it's no use to fret. But I suppose Ethel Leland is your wife, long ere this."

"No; she is single, and so am I."

"The Furies, you say! Honor bright, now, captain?"

"Why? What is it to you whether I ever wed her or not?"

"Considerable. She has a sister, has she not?"

"How did you find it out?"

"I have been spying around Mound Prairie. I lay in the opening and saw Ethel and Millie sail by like birds of paradise, and says I to myself: 'Waucosta, with Captain Disbrow's help, Millie Payville shall be your wife.'"

"And suppose I refuse to give my help?" said the captain.

"Oh, but you will! I know you will, captain, after what I have done for you."

"I paid you well for it," returned Disbrow.

"You think so, captain, but if you don't know how I suffered that winter, five years ago, in crossing the prairies to the east of here, you'd see that I was poorly paid. I must have Millie—I will have her, and you, captain, shall do your duty."

There was a threat in Waucosta's words, the meaning of which, Disbrow did not comprehend, or else he dare not refuse it. There was an acquaintance existing between these two men that was evidently fraught with some secret, which Waucosta appeared to wield with no little power.

After a moment's silence and reflection, Captain Disbrow asked:

"What would you have me do, Waucosta?"

"Any thing, Disbrow, any thing, so I can get Millie Payville for a wife. When I think of how high I came perishing in that snow-storm five years ago, in crossing the prairie, I think I am entitled to a pretty little wife to make the remainder of my days happy and shining."

"I shall do nothing against your getting her if you can, Waucosta, nor will I do any thing to help you get her."

"En? that's your decision, is it?"

"Then, by ge-mently, you shan't enjoy the happiness of being Ethel's husband!"

"I have paid you for your silence once," replied Disbrow, "and there should be honor even among rascals."

"Such as you and me, captain. Ha! ha! ha!" interrupted the renegade chief; "if you had never drifted into this country, captain, it's probable we'd never met again in this side of the brimstone pit; but as we have, I'd be a pretty fool to let such a chance for a wife, as Millie Payville is, go by, just because one rascal said he'd do a favor for another. Now don't you see my point, captain?"

The captain made no reply, but with the ferocity of a tiger he sprang at Waucosta and seized him by the throat.

"Curse you!" he hissed, "I will strangle the life out of your body."

Waucosta endeavored to defend himself, but he was no match for the enraged captain. In endeavoring to bear him to the earth, Disbrow pushed the chief across the opening into the brush. Here he tried to throw him again, but the light-footed chief managed to escape.

Slowly Disbrow pressed him through the undergrowth, until finally they stood upon the edge of the precipice, overlooking the lake. Here a desperate struggle ensued, but Disbrow proved the victor, by pushing Waucosta over the precipice into the lake.

He drew a breath of relief, and advancing to the edge of the cliff, gazed down into the water. He saw Waucosta struggling with the waves. He drew a pistol from the breast of his hunting-shirt, with the determination of shooting the renegade. He cocked the weapon and pointed it down at the chief. But he did not fire. At this juncture he beheld two small orbs of fire come into view from around an angle of the peninsula. He fixed his eyes upon these objects, and back of them, he beheld the dark, scaly form of the monster of the Lake, bearing, with swift wings, down upon the doomed Waucosta.

With a new terror—a conscience stained with crime—Roland Disbrow turned and fled the spot.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CAPTAIN'S TRIP TO MOUND PRAIRIE.

JABEZ DART waited and waited for the return of Old Solitary, until he finally began to think he never would come back.

But at length his patience was rewarded by hearing footsteps, and the next moment the old trapper was by his side.

"Back are you?" said the impatient detective.

"Yes," replied the trapper; "but I was detained longer than I expected to be."

"Well, what did you make out of that figure that passed us?"

"Siderable, Pizen, siderable. I've hearn lots and seen more since I've been gone. So I'll just tell you what it was."

He leaned forward and whispered in Dart's ear, as though he were afraid of other listeners about.

A low exclamation burst from the detective's lips when he had concluded his story. They conversed a few moments longer, then returned to camp.

The hunters had all recovered from their fright occasioned by the stray arrow, and returned to the camp, with the exception of Captain Disbrow. He was still absent, but came in soon after the return of Old Solitary and Dart, looking perfectly calm and self-composed.

"Wal, Cap, what diskivery did you make?" asked the old trapper.

"The woods are swarming with Indians, and I would suggest that this camp-fire be

put out, so that its light will not make us such conspicuous marks for savage bullets."

"Good advice, Cap," replied Old Solitary, "and I'm afraid Mound Prairie will suffer for want of some one to keep them on their guard there."

"I was just thinking of that, Solitary, and I believe it would be well for me to mount my horse and hasten back to the settlement and put the settlers on their guard."

"I'd favor the idea, Cap," said the trapper, and his words were repeated by every man present.

The captain waited for no further words upon the subject, but saddling his horse, he mounted and took his departure for Mound Prairie. He rode with all the speed of his horse, but did not reach the settlement until an hour after daylight the next morning.

He found the settlers all astir, and they were not a little surprised to see him there, his horse white with foam and panting with exhaustion.

"Why, captain, what is the matter?" asked Maurice Payville, whom he chanced to meet first.

"The Sioux are on the war-path, Maurice, and I have come to put you on your guard. I left the other boys at the lake, where the red demons are swarming thickly."

"Great God!" exclaimed Mr. Payville, "I hope we will not have to suffer the horrors of an Indian war!"

"The prospects are, alas! too favorable to believe otherwise, Mr. Payville, but let us be prepared to meet the foe when he comes."

"Yes, yes, captain; that is true. Get the men all together soon as possible, and issue your orders for the defense of the place. On your shoulders, captain, hangs the military part of the preparations."

With this assurance Disbrow went to work. A block-house, surrounded with palisades, which had been erected two years previous, was one of the strongest defensive features of the settlement, and this was put in readiness for immediate occupation, should the stern necessity of an attack require it.

The captain managed to keep himself busy all the time, though the responsibilities resting upon him did not require such active exertions. But then he had a motive in this. It was the hope of meeting Ethel Leland alone. He wished to have a talk with her, and in view of the threatening danger, urge her into an immediate marriage with him, so that she would be placed more directly under his protection.

It was near the middle of the afternoon of that same day that he saw Ethel issue from the door of a neighbor's cabin and move away toward her own home. As her course lay through a small grove, he bent his footsteps in a direction that would enable him to intercept her in the heart of the grove, where his path crossed hers at right angles.

As he neared the place of the anticipated meeting he was not a little startled by seeing Jabez Dart glide from a clump of bushes and confront Ethel. The maiden uttered a little cry at sight of him, but she soon calmed her emotions, and advancing, entered into a conversation with him.

Disbrow stopped short. He was astonished, surprised, for he supposed Dart was still at the lake. He was where he could see them, and yet not be seen himself, and from the quick gestures of Dart, and the emotions of Ethel, he knew their interview must be one of an extraordinary nature.

A secret resolve possessed the captain. An uneasy conscience made him suspect something—he knew not what, and crouching down, he crept softly to within earshot of Ethel and Dart, just in time to hear the latter say:

"Now, don't forget. Look in the crevice of the Hawthorne by the Crystal Spring about dark, and you will find a letter there, perhaps."

So saying, Dart moved away, and Ethel resumed her homeward course.

Disbrow's mind was so deeply involved in thought to follow either his betrothed or the detective. But their conduct seemed very strange, indeed. There was a bit of a mystery connected with it, and in his heart he resolved to know what secret the Hawthorne would have to reveal about dark.

(To be continued—commenced in No. 147.)

CHAPTER XVII.

BIG DAN AROUSED.

"Ha! there he goes! A bitter curse go with him! A scathing curse!"

—COLERIDGE.

The smile on the doctor's face was grim. Jiggers stared in amaze.

"My! What have you done?" stammered the latter.

"Sent him to the rats!" hissed Onnorram; and then he turned toward the trap, leaving Jiggers still gasping, staring, astonished.

"Alas!" he muttered, as he gazed down into the murky hole, and his eyes fairly danced behind the spectacles, "so you'll find out about your daughter, eh?—even if you have to choke me some! Pleasant, indeed—very pleasant. And you'll speak presently of the will you made, eh? Maybe so. You were rash, friend Mander. You should have known better. What?—I give up the prospect that has fed fat my old date for so long? Hardly! Tell you where Zella Mander is? Why should I? What a pity you were not killed, that day you rode the mettlesome steed whose sole ambition was to break the bones of every one who mounted him!—a great pity; for then I would have been saved this trouble."

He ceased suddenly, and listened in silence, for several seconds.

"I thought I heard a groan? No matter—it was fancy."

James Jiggers, impelled by curiosity, beyond the restraint of fear, had ventured in on tiptoe and he craned his neck to look down into the depths of darkness.

Onnorram eyed him fixedly.

"Rats!" was the brief answer.

"Oh, my!"

"And skeletons!"

"My!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ZELLA HAS A VISITOR.

"And if now the skies look black; All the past behind my back; Is a bright and blessed track; Never mind!"

Be then tranquil as a dove:
Through these thunder-clouds above
Shines afar the heaven of love.
Never mind!"—TUPPER.

As Theophilus Ommorann hurried through a street not far from his own residence, his attention was attracted by a barouche that came swiftly along, with spirited horses chafing under a tight rein.

It was the one containing Hugh Winfield and Ildé Wyn.

We have seen that the Doctor was immediately struck with Ildé's resemblance to Zella Kearn, and also, that he discovered Zella, by an accidental glance up at the third-story windows of the house directly opposite.

While considering what she could be doing there, he almost involuntarily crossed over and pulled the door-bell.

"I wish to see Miss Kearn," he said, to the servant who appeared.

"Miss Kearn?" repeated the girl, inquiringly.

"The young lady who occupies a third-story front room."

"Oh, you mean the new boarder? Yes, sir. Walk in, please," and, ushering him into the parlor, she asked:

"What name shall I say, sir?"

"Um! Well—just tell her that Doctor Ommorann would like to see her."

While the servant started on her errand up-stairs, the physician stood in the center of the parlor, stroking his smooth chin, and gazing thoughtfully down at the carpet.

"New boarder, eh? I wonder what that means. Zella Kearn generally goes to her aunt's when she comes to town—now she don't, and she's a boarder. A boarder?"

repeating the word as if it meant more than he could understand. "Rather queer, this. Wonder if she's alone? If yes, then what's she doing at a strange house?—a boarder—um! A boarder, too?"

It did seem that Heaven was unkind, in sending Hugh Winfield to Zella's gaze, when the unhappy girl had striven so hard to forget him, and to smother the gnawings of her rejected love.

It had cost her every effort of will she was capable of, to do what she had done—say good-by to all the dear scenes about her home—dear in themselves, though they reminded her bitterly of him to whose heart she had turned in vain.

It was but a sort of apathy, this new life among strange surroundings, and amid surroundings that were drear.

The shapely head, drooping upon her arm, on the window sill, was trembling, as she sobbed; and she felt, in this fresh pain, as if existence was burdensome—as if she did not, and could never, care for anything.

She had a strong will; but there is no limit to the influences of an absorbing, passionate love—the most rigid hearts will melt, and resolutions of iron are overcome beneath its penetrating power.

All the determination to forget Hugh Winfield, which had been hers, now vanished, and left her with a bleeding heart, a weeping spirit—a being of veriest wretchedness, in atmospheres of woe.

"Oh, Hugh!—Hugh!" she moaned, "I thought you loved me! When you spoke, or in whatever you did, I thought—yes, I was sure I saw some sign of affection. You told me you did love me; but, is it true? Would you let me suffer in this way, if it was so?"

But she added, after a second, as if she would not blame him:

"You don't know, though you don't know, you'll never know, Hugh, what misery you have caused me—no—no—no!"

She raised her tearful eyes to look once again down the street.

But, the barouche was gone; only the busy, bustling throng met her straining gaze.

"I can not live long this way—oh! I can not! Why did I ever let myself love him? Yes—yes—I feel as if I could—die!"

The head would have bowed again, and a new gush of tears was dimming her vision, when there came a gentle tap at the door.

She started, and hurriedly dried her cheeks.

"Come," she said, after a moment, when the heaving bosom was forced to calmness, and her voice schooled to evenness.

"There's a gentleman in the parlor to see you, Miss," announced the girl, who entered.

"To see me?" in surprise; "who is it? What is his name?"

"He told me just to say, that Doctor Ommorann would like to see you."

"Doctor Ommorann?" repeated Zella, in growing astonishment; and she asked herself: "How did he find out I was here? What can he want?"

"Yes, Miss, that's the name. Will you come down?—or shall I—shall I tell him to come up here?"

Zella colored slightly. It certainly would not look proper to receive a visitor in her bedroom; yet she resolved to do this, as she did not wish to be seen by the boarders, several of whom were just then returning for dinner. Besides, the caller was a physician, and—

"I will receive him here," she replied, to the girl's question before she finished debating the point in her mind.

"Yes, Miss."

Doctor Ommorann was presently ushered in. He entered with a bow and a smile, rubbing his skinny hands together—a habit he had—and spoke in a pleasant tone.

"Miss Kearn—quite a surprise. How do you do, to-day? Hope I see you well. Ah, yes—quite a surprise, indeed. I didn't expect to find you in the city—as a boarder, too."

"Be seated, Doctor. Are you well?"

"Always well—always well, thank you, my dear."

At first sound of her voice he detected sadness in it. He saw that she was pale, uneasy of manner, much unlike herself.

"I do not think you are in good health, my dear," he said, solicitously, appropriating a chair, and watching her closely.

Zella would not meet his gaze.

"Yes, Doctor, I am feeling very badly. I can not deny it, but, not exactly sick. I—indeed, I scarcely know what is the matter with me."

"You are decidedly sick. Permit me." He slipped snailly from his chair, advanced, felt of her pulse, trying, while he held the white wrist, not to look grave.

"Um! Extraordinary nervousness. How long have you been in town?"

"Not long," answered Zella, after some hesitation.

"That's an evasion," thought Ommorann, watching her half-averted face. "Now what does she mean by that?" then aloud: "Yesterday?—day before?—to-day?"

"Yesterday," reluctantly.

"Um! Yes. Let me prescribe for you,

my dear. Have you anybody here that you can send to the nearest apothecary?"

"Oh, it's of no consequence, Doctor. I—'Tut! Tut! don't talk nonsense now. You are on the verge of hysterics, I see that plainly."

He stepped over to the bell-rop, despite her protestations; then, while he resumed his seat, and took out his diary to write, he inquired:

"Your father well?"

"Yes—I believe so."

He darted a momentary glance at her, over the spectacles, and commented, mentally:

"That's another evasion. What's the matter with her? She's solemn as a ghost, and she used to be frolicsome as a kitten."

But he was completely baffled.

"Something wrong—something wrong. I must sift this."

After one of the servants had been dispatched to the nearest drug-store, he set about trying to ascertain why she was there, exactly when she came, and what had caused the sudden change in her—transforming her from a merry, laughing girl, to a pale, saddened woman.

She evaded his questioning, with the readiness of female wit.

After doing his best, in vain, in a conversation of nearly two hours, he withdrew.

"Confound it!" he muttered, as he left the house, "I am no wiser for my labor. But I'll see her again, to-morrow. I am determined to know what this means. Something wrong—I'll wager on it. Ah! she's a fine girl—very fine. She must be my wife, too, shortly. Yes, friend Kearn—marry the first to him who tried to win the widow whose first love died!"

This little beauty must marry Theophilus Ommorann, or you'll never find out where your own child is—so help me cross-bones! Well, you young rascal!—stop your screaming!

Hear me?" the last to a ragged newsboy, with a dirty face, who came running and screaming loudly, flourishing the evening paper.

"Buy one, sir?—Full account of the strange death on the Bellefontaine Road."

"Death on the Bellefontaine, eh?" he stopped short, as he questioned, and looked sharply down at the urchin.

"Yes, sir. Big thing. Found dead; and full of blood. Heap of excitement, sir. Buy one?"

"Yes—I'll read it," and as he received and paid for the paper, he was mumbling: "Wonder what it is, now. Bellefontaine, eh? That's pretty close. It might be Kearn's."

He was about to fold the journal up, and ram it into his pocket, when he felt a sudden prompting to look at the item of importance.

It was on the first page, in display type, and he glanced carelessly at the account.

Immediately, however, he uttered a quick exclamation, his face assumed a rigid expression, and he half-crunched the paper in his grasp.

CHAPTER XX.

A TRIO OF SPIES.

"We meet again when years have flown,
When time has wrought a wondrous change,
But do not meet as if unknown
In scenes of silence, awe and strange."

—AXON.

BIG DAN stood, for a moment, before the entrance to the hallway leading to Doctor Ommorann's office.

"When he passed in—not like one calling on a matter of business, but in a way that would have excited the suspicions of a looker-on."

Inside the door, he paused, and drew off his boots—then he listened.

"Something's wrong," he muttered. "I don't see why that old knave should come out first a-laughin', when Mander went on particular business, that'd be mighty apt to keep Doc Ommorann in the house. Let's see 'bout this 'ere."

He moved stealthily ahead.

As he advanced, he began to grin, and indulged in a scarce-audible chuckle; for he had practiced that thing before, in the hour of midnight, when plying his vocation—a burglar, as the reader may have surmised.

At the head of the stairs he paused a second time and listened.

On one side was the office door, with a card to that effect tacked thereon.

But he had not now any intention of entering there; for a sound had struck his hearing—a familiar sound—a low, weird song.

It came from the story above, and Dan was markedly attentive.

"I've heard that 'ere before," he exclaimed, half-aloud; and he became more and more interested while following the singer's voice, for it reminded him of something that was far in the scenes of the past.

The voice was Beula's. The blind Quadrant, in her prison apartment, was singing, as was her wont, and the air was working a singular effect on Cassar.

Presently he turned to the stairs and started upward.

Reaching the third story, he stole noiselessly forward—tip-toeing, halting, anon, and glancing around, to be sure that he was not discovered.

Then he came before the door of the room from whence issued the singing that had attracted him.

"I never heard but one person have that 'ere tune," he uttered, to himself, "an' it was long ago. Mighty strange."

His quick eye soon detected the slide in the panel, and he at once proceeded to open it.

Beula was engaged at knitting—her usual occupation.

Suddenly she started. The song hushed; she turned her sightless orbs in the direction of the door; for a short-breathed exclamation had reached her.

Dan was looking in through the small opening. He saw a woman whom he knew well, though many years had elapsed since he met her last, and then her eyes were bright and piercing.

"Beula!" fell from his thick lips, in astonishment.

"Who called me?" she demanded, leaning slightly forward, and intent to catch the next sound.

At first he seemed riveted, gazing steadfast in his surprise; then, after a hasty glance behind him, he spoke guardedly.

"Beula!"

"Who calls?" she repeated, while his voice seemed to have struck some eager chord within her.

"One 'at knows you well," answered the giant.

Her memory was keen. A peculiar expression settled in her withered features; she arose and groped her way toward him.

"I know that tongue! I know that tongue!" she croaked.

"You wasn't blind when you an' me was best together—who am I?"

"I know you! I know you!" She was by the slide, and reached one hand through to feel the face that was peering in.

"Who am I?"

"It's Dan Cassar," she said, quickly, and in a whisper. "Ho! how came you to be here?"

"Yes, it's Dan Cassar."

"I remember you, Dan—why shouldn't I? Oh! I remember you well."

"What're you doin' here?"

"Hush!" raising a warning finger, "don't talk loud—don't talk loud. You're come in good time, Dan Cassar! Who sent you? How did you find old Beula?"

"Just a kinder accident."

"Sh! listen! I am a prisoner."

"I'll jest tuncle you out, then," he interrupted, "if I hev to bust the door down."

"Sh! no—no; I don't want to get out. See, Dan—I have no eyes now. I am a helpless old thing. My jailer takes good care of me—he! he! he! and he had best do so," the last with a meaning chuckle.

"I might as well die here as anywhere else. But, I am afraid to die! I don't want to die yet! Dan Cassar, I am glad you found me. I want to tell you something—something very precious to us."

"What're you a prisoner for?" he interrogated.

Her mouth twitched, and her fingers worked, as if some inward excitement was preying upon her.

"Ommorann, the Doctor, keeps me here."

"Sh! not so loud. I'll tell you—is there anybody near?"

"No."

"Come into the room, Dan Cassar. The key is in the lock outside. Come in—come in."

Dan turned the key, and stepped into the apartment.

He led him to one side, where they could not be seen, in case some one should come to the slide in the panel, and motioned him to sit down.

The giant was filled with a sort of awe in her presence. He watched her, as she went across the room to draw up another chair—and he almost imagined he could see the well-remembered eyes as they had been wont to sparkle, when he met her, so many years before.

Beula was about to reveal something. He waited in silence.

James Jiggers, under the influence of the contents of his pocket-flask, was rocking unsteadily at his desk.

The pen had dropped from his hand, his head had sunk forward on his breast, and he finally settled down to a slumber of partial intoxication.

But, despite the extreme care which Cassar exercised in ascending the second flight of stairs, a creaking sound fell on the half-insensible hearing of the sleeper.

Under the circumstances, when his nerves were so touchy, and his senses unsettled by the recent occurrence in which he figured—the effect was to rouse Jiggers with a start, and, blinking and ogling, he glanced toward the door of the adjoining room.

Presently, however, the creaking noise was repeated, and his head turned, like a ball on a pivot, toward the door leading to the entry.

"Somebody out there—(hic) there," he hiccupped. "Who?—tain't Doctor, for—(hic)—he k—knows I haven't been asleep long. There it is again."

Whoever it was, he comprehended that they were moving with stealth; more, he knew that the party was proceeding upward, for he was aware of the creaking tendency of the second flight of stairs; and, finally, impelled by his incurable curiosity, he got up and went to the door, which he opened with care.

Looking out through a narrow crack, he was lost in astonishment, at beholding a man of enormous build, carrying his boots in his hand, and going upward with catlike tread.

His body stooped, his mouth gaped, his ogle eyes stared.

When Dan Cassar disappeared around the landing, Jiggers issued forth, and followed after, with the silence of a moving specter. The effect of the liquor left him entirely.

And when Beula drew the giant across to the front of the room, to speak with him, Jiggers was already at the slide, alive to catch every word that might pass.

There was another party, also, to the scene.

At the front of the hall was a long window overlooking the street. Heavy curtains draped before the panes, and behind the curtains was the mulatto girl—Ommorann's housekeeper—who had seen Cassar go into Beula's room, and who now watched the eavesdropping James Jiggers.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 143.)

Mohenesto:

Trap, Trigger and Tomahawk.

BY HENRY M. AVERY,
(MAJOR MAX MARTINE).

XXI.—Aztec Valley of the Rio Gila.—A Castilian Family.—Checkmate.—Spanish Courtship.—An Aristocratic Fandango.—Meeting an Old Friend.—The Spanish Waltz.—An Introduction and a Warning.—An Awakening Fit.—A Woman won't, she won't.—A Shot from the Enemy.

AFTER leaving the Rio Colorado, we shaped our course to the south, down into the Aztec valley of the Rio Gila river.

Late one day we came to the hacienda of an old Spaniard, who readily gave us permission to remain over night. The hacienda was situated about five miles to the north of the Pueblo de Prieto, in one of the richest portions of that magnificent valley.

The owner, Don Gonzalo, was, I think, the finest-formed man I ever saw. Though nearly sixty years of age, his form was still unimpaired; his hair long, black and glossy, with that peculiar tint of blue so common in Spain, showed not one thread of gray, and his piercing black eyes were as brilliant as ever they were. His family consisted of two children, a son and daughter.

Don Nunnaz, the son, was the perfect image of his father, or as his father must have been at his age. As for the senorita, she was the embodiment of all that is lovely in womanhood. Neither too tall nor too short, there was a refinement in the regular features, there was a noble intellect in the

broad forehead, there was a world of passion in the deep black eyes, and an iron will in the firm-set though finely-chiseled lips. Underlying all these feminine attributes was a kind heart, as was manifested by the tenderness with which she treated those about her, and a grace and loveliness befitting a queen.

This fair Castilian, beautiful as she was, was but the type of the pure Spanish race, but the peculiar circumstances attending our first acquaintance were calculated to leave a lasting impression upon my mind, and so they did.

We saw our horses provided for, and entering the hacienda, were soon at home with the family. About his place were, at least, seventy-five peons—half-breeds of the Spanish-Mexican race—(those mongrel beings who have no pedigree, no nation, and no God from whom I learned that we had at last found a character we were seeking—a wealthy native. In conversation the don informed me that he was then working a silver mine near the hacienda, and that he had recently struck a new lode, which gave promise of being a very rich one. Nearly every mile of the country from here to the city of Mexico has pits and sink-holes in the earth, where once were the shafts to mines, worked hundreds of years ago, by the conquering race.

My companions found enjoyment in a game of monte with the don and his son, while I was in a fair way of forgetting myself in a game of chess with the fair senorita. I may mention, en passant, that the don had lost his wife at the birth of the daughter, eighteen years before, and had never married again. The fair Violette and myself occupied the further end of the room by an open window, through which the fragrance of an orange grove was wafted; and, busy with our game of chess, we gave no heed to the passing hours until reminded by the don that it was growing late.

But a game of chess may be a long or short one, according to the inclination of the players, and the rest of the party retired, leaving the senorita and myself to finish the game, which, truth to tell, she never married again. The fair Violette and myself occupied the further end of the room by an open window, through which the fragrance of an orange grove was wafted; and, busy with our game of chess, we gave no heed to the passing hours until reminded by the don that it was growing late.

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MY SYLVAN SYLPH

BY JOE JOY, JR.

I'll ne'er forget when first we met,
Full many a scented rose
Bloomed by the door in which she sat—
Industriously putting new heels in some old
woolen hose.

And I approached in a dream,
Unconsciously and slow,
And, bless her, she did hasten out—
And made that everlasting old bulldog let
go!

And oh, she had the sweetest voice
My fond ear ever knew!
My memory seems to hear it yet—
In "Why, lawskes alive, mister, how de
doo?"

I marvelled at her blushing hair
Which fell in many a coil—
And needed nothing in the world—
Except two or three handfuls of scented
bear's oil.

You'd take her for no city belle
Made up of pride and lace,
She moved a queen about the house—
And stepped on the little blind kittens with
native grace.

I thought she was a fairy sprite
That walked upon the air,
Or trod like Venus on the wave—
And when I saw the size of her shoes I
thought my guess was rather fair.

She wore a gentle winning smile,
Which trouble could not break,
Her eyes were full of tenderness—
And her mouth, which was none too small,
was generally pretty full of cake.

Her heart, so good, was ever warm
With love for all her kind,
I knew it when she softly said—
"Alas! bid, go chase those piggies out and
don't you hurt them, mind!"

She stole my heart when first we met,
But I adore her still,
And none can calculate her worth—
Her everlasting old father hasn't taken a
notion yet to get sick and make his
will.

A Woman's Scheme.

A SKETCH OF CITY LIFE.

BY CAPT. CHARLES HOWARD.

ONE cool night in October, during the
present lustrum, "Daring Val," one of the
boldest, and consequently most noted
cracksmen of New York, leaned over the
counter of a low underground "thieves' re-
treat," scanning the "Personals" of a promi-
nent city journal.

This man had committed more burglaries
than any two thieves then in the city, and the
papers, uttering the sentiments of the law-
abiding citizens, clamored loudly for his
apprehension. But he adroitly eluded the
police, and continued to pursue his re-
famous calling in their very faces.

It was rumored, and rightly, too, as our
story will show, that "Daring Val," as the
burglar was called by everybody, had been
employed by wealthy persons to carry out
their petty revenge, and was still in the em-
ploy of scheming men and women.

The cracksmen's eyes ran down the
"Personal column," upon the October night
above written, until they suddenly rested
upon the following advertisement, which
struck him very forcibly:

"PERSONAL. Will the gentleman, with the
gold anchor, who sat opposite the lady in green
silk, in the — avenue cars, yesterday, please
call at No. — Fourth avenue, between the
hours of seven and nine to-night?"

The burglar read the advertisement
twice before he uttered a word.

"Why, that must mean me," he said,
slightly above a whisper. "I was dressed
in my best, yesterday, and sported a gold
anchor, and rode in the — avenue cars,
opposite the lady in green silk. How she eyed
me then! Her garments told me she was
in good circumstances, although they bore
marks of long wear. Yes," after a long
pause, "I'll go and see what she wants of
Val Rettick. It's about six now."

The adroit scoundrel folded the paper
and walked leisurely from the den.

Twenty minutes later he reappeared, at-
tired in a suit of broadcloth, fashionably
cut. His mass of raven hair betrayed the
presence of an oleaginous compound, and a
heavy gold chain from which dangled the
anchor which had attracted the attention of
"the lady in green," contrasted glitteringly
with his white vest.

He stepped to the bar, and after empty-
ing a wine-glass with a single gulp, he
strode from the apartment, imitating a dan-
dy's gait, to the amusement of several crim-
inal companions.

Once upon the street, he entered a car,
and presently stood beneath the particular
number on Fourth avenue designated by
the "personal."

He rung the bell with the air of a refined
gentleman, which he could admirably coun-
terfeit, and was ushered into the richest ap-
pointed parlor he had ever entered.

After bestowing a look upon several su-
perb pictures that adorned the walls, the
dandy burglar threw himself upon a rich
sofa, and toyed with his chain, until the
rustle of silk saluted his ears.

A moment later the door opened, and a
beautiful woman, attired in green silk,
heavily founced, swept into the apartment.
The recognition was mutual.

The lady glanced at Rettick's "gold an-
chor," and smilingly complimented him for
answering her "personal" so promptly.

"I know you, sir," she said, after a brief
exchange of words. "You are Daring Val
Rettick, the burglar, and, sir, I advertised
to tell you that I have work for you—work
that, if well performed, will fill your pockets
with greenbacks."

"I am ever ready to work for those who
pay without stint," answered Val. "And
I would be pleased to know what I have to
do in this case. The greater the risk, the
better the reward."

The woman in green smiled, and drew
nearer the thief.

"My uncle," she said, in a low tone, "lies
upon the point of death. He is rich—will
leave a cool hundred thousand behind him.
Years ago, when I was a little girl and an
orphan, he took me to his home, and pro-
claimed me his heiress to his wealth. I
dwelt in peace with him until two years
ago, when, in a fit of anger, of which I un-
avoidably was the remote cause, he drove
me from his roof, and took a beggar to his
hearth, whom he now calls his heiress."

"I am satisfied," she continued, "that
the will he once drew up bequeathing his
all to me, for he is childless, is destroyed,
and that a new one lies beyond the insecure
doors of his old cabinet. I want that will.
With it in my power, I can make Violet
Fortney a beggar indeed, and become mis-
tress of the situation again. What sum do
you demand for the work?"

"Describe the risk."

The lady did so.

"I will disguise myself in plain garments,
and await you on the pavement, near the
alley," she continued.

"Well," said Rettick, "I accept your aid,
and, in consideration of the neat sum of
five thousand dollars, shall complete the
work to your satisfaction."

The woman agreed to pay the sum de-
manded, and the following night was select-
ed for the dark work.

Val Rettick took his leave.

Julia Coleman felt her uncle's will within
her grasp.

She paced the room with a triumphant
and self-satisfied air, picturing to herself
Violet Fortney's reverse of fortune.

It was her fault that she did not fill Vi-
olet's place, at that hour, beside the bed of
her dying uncle.

William Coleman loved his niece until
her pride and stubbornness compelled him to
drive her from his presence.

The ambitious girl became fascinated by
a sudden arrival—a handsome fellow, with
foreign airs, who called himself Count La
Boyteaux. In vain the old man tried to
persuade Julia that the dandy was a heart-
less adventurer. She hung upon his foot-
steps, and one night, having yielded to the
villain's blandishments—having made her-
self his slave—she attempted to rob her
relative; but was detected by the old man.

Then, finding his niece beyond reforma-
tion, Willard Coleman, with tears in his
eyes for his brother's memory, drove her
from his house, and resolved to try and for-
get her.

Several nights later a poor sewing-ma-
chine girl saved him from several villains
who were dogging his steps, and, to reward
her, he took her to his luxurious home, and
thus Violet Fortney became the old man's
heiress.

As the reader has seen, Julia told Daring
Val quite a different story from the forego-
ing.

Soon La Boyteaux deserted his deluded
victim, and she entered the house of a
wealthy merchant as a governess, resolving to
bide her time for revenge.

The city clocks were proclaiming the
hour of eleven upon the night following the
interview between the fair employer and



A WOMAN'S SCHEME.

her tool, when two persons came together
on the corner of Third avenue and Fourth
street.

They met as if by accident; but their sub-
sequent actions proclaimed the meeting one
of design.

The woman, for one of the twain was a
representative of the tender sex, was plain-
ly clad, and the man wore a tightly-buttoned
coat with great collar, and a slouched
hat.

After a short conversation they moved off
together, and presently the man entered a
dark alley, at the mouth of which the woman
stationed herself as a kind of sentry.

The man moved off in the gloom. At
length he ascended to a low roof, and en-
tered a back window. Then he drew a
dark lantern from his bosom, and opened
an old cabinet that stood in the room he
had burglariously entered. In a drawer he
found a manuscript, which he glanced over,
and transferred to an inner pocket.

A minute later he left the apartment as
noiselessly as he had entered.

Sliding from the roof, he hurried toward
the street where the woman waited; but,
just as he emerged from the alley an intoxi-
cated Hibernian, in his efforts to escape a
policeman, stumbled and struck him in the
breast with his head, with such force as to
hurt both to the stones!

The woman screamed at the catastrophe,
and before Daring Val, the will-stealer, could
recover, two policemen stood over him.

"Release that Celt," said one, "for he has
placed a rich prize in our power."

The speaker had recognized "Daring
Val."

Julia Coleman heard the words, and turned
to fly.

"No, my covey!" said a gruff voice, and
she felt her arm in the vice-like grip of a
blue-coated M. P.

A woman's scheme had signally failed.

At the station-house the stolen will was
taken from Val Rettick, and returned to a
securer place than the old cabinet.

Willard Coleman died without hearing
of Julia's sentence of servitude in the State
prison; but they told him of Daring Val's
execution for a crime committed years be-
fore.

After diligent inquiry Violet found the
Irishman who had baffled the schemer, and
handsomely rewarded him. He is now a
reformed man.

Violet married shortly after the above oc-
currence.

A was one day asked his friend,
"How many knaves do you suppose are in
this street besides yourself?" "Besides
myself?" replied the other, in a passion;
"do you mean to insult me?" "Well,
then," replied the first, "how many do you
reckon, including yourself?"

Recollections of the West.

"Foxing" for Burglars.

BY CAPT. "BRUIN" ADAMS.

ONLY those who were in San Francisco
in the early days, actually on the ground
and observers of what took place, can have
any true conception of the extent to which
lawlessness and crime were carried.

Vigilance committees were promptly or-
ganized, but in very many cases their efforts
were paralyzed by some traitor in their
midst giving early information to suspected
parties, or warning those already known as
guilty in time for them to escape the doom
that awaited them.

Such was the condition of affairs in that
city when the Merchants' and Mechanics' Bank
was first opened. The strong stone
building stood near the center of a row of
substantial business houses on the principal
thoroughfare, and with its barred and
heavily-shuttered windows, and massive
double-door, it was considered impregnable,
no matter how determined or skillful might
be the efforts of those seeking to enter in
any other than the proper way. Besides
these safeguards the usual night watch-
man was always locked in, and then noth-
ing more could be done—at least, so it was
thought.

For several months the affairs of the
bank progressed smoothly. The officers
and *attaches*, among whom was myself, as
assistant book-keeper, fell into the usual
grooves of banking work, and up to the
time of which I am about to speak, nothing
had occurred to break its monotony.

The chief officers were congratulating
themselves upon the efficacy of their ar-
rangements, by which all depredators were
set at defiance, when suddenly the shock
came, dissipating these fond expectations
to the four winds.

Early one morning, while leisurely sip-
ping his coffee, the president, who was
generally at the bank first of all, was
aroused by the sharp clatter of horse's
hoofs upon the graveled walk outside, and

manner. So great was the secrecy, and it
was of course proper, that none save the
president, cashier, and head book-keeper,
knew of this new arrangement that was to
set the burglars at defiance.

Well, the work was completed, and busi-
ness proceeded as usual.

A single watchman again had charge, but
it was known in the building that a small
closet, with a heavy door, through which
there was a port-hole, had been fitted up
for his accommodation, and it came to be a
standing joke that the watchman was to re-
treat into his fortification in case of alarm,
and open upon the enemy through the slit
in the door. We didn't know then how
near the truth we were.

Matters progressed smoothly through the
winter; no signs of burglars, or even of
their attempts to enter the bank.

Confidence in the "new arrangement" was
beginning to be felt. The thieves had
heard rumors, probably, of some wonder-
ful, mysterious agent that would defeat
them if they made a raid, or perhaps in-
volve all in a common destruction, and so
stayed away.

The inventor (it was the head book-keeper)
of the burglar-proof was in high glee over
the success of his idea, and in fact a feeling
of security was again prevailing when the
alarm was again sounded, and all was up-
roar and confusion.

The door of the bank had been found
open in the morning, and the watchman
was gone, none knew whither.

Every thing in the bank appeared in or-
der. The safes were intact, the furniture
and books undisturbed—in a word, every
thing was as usual, save that the door had
been found open and the watchman gone.

Again a crowd assembled about the
building; a messenger was dispatched for
the president, cashier and book-keeper.

The president came first, and a brief in-
spection of the premises seemed to satisfy
his mind that nothing had been touched.

The book-keeper came next, and after
glancing around, and peering cautiously be-
hind a small green curtain that hung against
the wall on the right of the large safe or
vault, he turned, nodded to the president
and left the room.

A few minutes later the cashier arrived,
in the greatest possible state of excitement.
The day previous an unusually large amount
of coin had come into the bank, and he
knew if this was gone, the institution was
gone with it.

What followed after his hurried entrance,
key in hand, I have never been able to
clearly recollect.

I remember that he passed me hurriedly,
with a scared look upon his face, and with
rapid strides advanced direct to the vault.

I saw him insert the huge key, give it a
twist, and as he grasped the knob, hear the
voice of the president shouting, "Hold,
Duncan for God's sake!"

The remainder of the sentence was
drowned in a deafening report, instantly
followed by another; then a dull, heavy
fall, and all was silent as death in the large
room.

This then was the "burglar protection,"
and what we saw before us, the mangled,
bleeding, lifeless form of a good and true
man, the result.

So it was. The "idea" had worked well,
and the large, double-barreled gun, loaded
almost to the muzzle with buckshot and
heavy slugs, which had been let into the
wall, and by fine wires connected with the
door of the vault, had sent its deadly charge
from behind the green curtain, sweeping
the space in front of the vault, and crush-
ing to death, as I have already said, a good
and true man.

The arrangement, it seemed, entered into
by the three men, who alone had the right
to enter the vault, was, that the first ar-
riving should *always* detach the wire that ran
down the wall beside the safe.

Had this been strictly attended to, no ac-
cident could possibly have happened. Of
the first two who came, the president and
book-keeper, each thought the other had, or
would detach the fatal wire, or else in the
excitement, totally forgot all about it, most
probably the latter, and so poor Duncan
had met his death.

Of the watchman nothing was ever heard,
not even the faintest clue, and it was sup-
posed, and probably correctly, that the bur-
glars had wind of there being some deadly
contrivance connected with the vault, and,
after breaking in, had insisted upon the
poor fellow's explaining, or removing the
contrivance, so they could go to work, and
upon his refusing, had murdered him and
concealed the body.

Shortly after the tragedy, I left the Paci-
fic coast, but I have since frequently heard
of the Merchants' and Mechanics' Bank,
and am always pleased to learn that since
that terrible morning, burglars have given
it a wide berth.

WHAT comes from the heart goes to
the heart.

HOW THEIR MEWSSES FIT.

BY I-O-TA.

Of'ar up in a furlorn-lookin' attic
With hes heels sum higher'n hes nose,
Sot one uv eour modurn scribbles,
Yest c'u'd tell by hes shabby clothes,
With hes good 'quill' twist his fingers,
Hes bristlin' ha'r onkemp,
A-tryin' to trap the mew-sses
As' fore hes veshum they went.

Thar wur in av ther varmint's nigh
An' both on 'em wanted in
Thalyer, ther shiner in sunshine,
Erater, in shades grum,
He felt kinder sorres-cum-suffles;
Hes in'ards reither lank;
Fur hes rashuns wur e'namos' nowhar,
An' hes shiners, nary one, in eour bank.

He looked wilder'n a boss fur a minit,
Then away went ther all-fired brother—
"Ther bright, yaller mune is shinin' down
"Like a cheese!" screamed sot ther t'other.
"Why lift yer head from thos' mune,
Thon queen uv my heart's penetrat'er?
Sugar is nowhar—why leave me thuse?"
"Fur in mune!" yelled that pesky Thalyer.

"Star uv my life, my heart is 'hull,
"Twil hold your image ever,
Say, wunt you name ther happy day?
Shall it be—" "Neow or never!"
"My cabin needs one piker yet,
My life is dre'dful lank;
I hanker arter your preshus self—"
"Along with your 'ol dad's money!"

Eour Post scratched hes pate in style,
Yest'd thort sum critters wur in it;
Then slung hes quill with a despret word,
An' looked askew of wif ther t'other.
He felt that one *built* sheet wur ap'ied,
He c'u'd tell t'other from which,
So he hung hes manerss up to dry
With a reg'lor cuss on sich.

Beat Time's Notes.

It was an ill wind yesterday that blew
nobody good, but blew everybody bad. It
blew a hurricane, and the hurricane blew
all the buttons off my coat, loosened my
eyebrows, and blew all the blacking from
my boots. It blew a cellar clear over into
another man's yard; the man, opening his
mouth to remonstrate, was blown complet-
ly up. It blew "Yankee Doodle" on a
gridiron. It blew Thursday clear back into
Wednesday, and completely put a stop to
the telegraph business by blowing all the
dispatches back to the office they came
from. It blew people's teeth down their
throats, and their words were blown clear
out of their mouths and carried far out
west. It blew up several steam-boilers. It
blew the Hudson river out of its bed and
onto the floor. It blew down the prices of
things, and blew over the hills. It blew so
hard the sun's rays couldn't touch the
earth, and it warped several of our straight-
est streets. It blew the keels off of several
vessels, and blew all the steamboat whis-
tles. Take it altogether, there was quite a
stir in the atmosphere yesterday.

Brown is getting old. He can no longer
see without the aid of crutches, nor walk
without having on his spectacles. The
teeth, one by one, have fallen out of his
ears, and he can eat no longer without the
aid of his ear-trumpet. He said, the other
day, he guessed he would have to get a
new set of false teeth for his head and a
wig for his mouth. His feet tremble as
they convey food to his mouth, and his
hands are feeble to walk upon, and I fear
that he will die of old age, if he dies soon
enough.

ONCE, in my active days, I got under the
eaves of a barn to keep out of the rain, and
the lightning struck the barn and made for
me. I started around the barn, and the
lightning after me; for the first twenty
minutes it was hard to tell whether the
lightning was after me or I was after it; in
the next ten minutes I had gained on it till
it was only ten feet ahead of me. Upon
seeing this the lightning gave up in disgust
and ran into the ground. I used to be
more active than I am now.

Did you ever see a thorn tree? Did you
ever try to climb one? And, further, did
you ever find out what they were originally
intended for? If they bore apples or pears,
they would be of some benefit; but they
bear no kind of fruit that is worth stealing,
and such birds as build nests in them are
not the kind that intelligent little boys are
fond of. Barefooted boys step very lightly
under them and never deign to look up at
the tree. When I start an orchard, I shall
graft my fruit on thorn trees and have the
fun of picking it myself.

A MAN was lately found out West all
chopped to pieces and buried. The jury
searched his pockets and found a verdict
that defendant had committed suicide in
the first degree, and recommended him to
the mercy of the court.

THE telescope shows us 700,000,000
worlds, so I'd like to know what's the use
trying to make a stir in one! I'm com-
pletely discouraged, and propose to quit.

WHETHER I get credit for it or not, I
prevented a good-sized fight yesterday;
that is to say—I prevented it by running
away.

MANY a man's tongue has slipped and
broken his neck.

SPLINTER is so awful nice that when his shad-
ow fell in a mud-puddle, he fished it out
and sent it to the washwoman to have it
washed and ironed again.

WHEN I see a young man in the first
stages of early senility, dyed to the last
extremity, I—don't know what to think.

WE have ex-congressmen and ex-Govern-
ors and X bills—the latter are the best;
that is the cross that most people follow
with the greatest faith.

BASE-BALLS—CARNI-BALS.

I KNOW a man so awfully mean that Satan
will not be pleased when he dies, for it
will take all of his available force to shovel
brimstone.

Not every one who leers can write a
lyric.

A SONNET is a small son.

THE best way to play a flute is to roll a
piece of music up and place it inside and
then blow it out.

WHY is it that most of our aliens are so
eager for ale?

JONES says he would get drunk every day,
but it costs so much to pay his fare there.